2184

PARTISAN REVIEW

JULY-AUGUST, 1954

LESLIE A. FIEDLER
Pull Down Vanity! (a long story)

JAMES BALDWIN
Paris Letter: A Question of Identity

JACOB TAUBES
From Cult to Culture

DWIGHT MACDONALD
McCarthy and His Apologists

ERIC BENTLEY
The Drama: An Extinct Species?

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER JR.
God's Country and Mr. Kronenberger

MARTIN GREENBERG
Randall Jarrell's Tall Epigram

Anton Chekhov
LETTERS ABOUT WRITERS AND WRITING

4

75c

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEW HARCOURT, BRACE *BOOKS*

Peter Taylor

The Widows of Thornton. "Mr. Taylor is that rare old-fashioned thing, a natural writer of fiction, and his stories are as truthful and individual as they are natural. Chekhov himself would have been delighted by little masterpieces like 'What You Hear From 'Em?' and 'The Death of a Kinsman' . . . These stories are funny and touching and as real as real can be."—RANDALL JARRELL $3.75

William Sansom

A Bed of Roses. "The Spanish background is a vividly felt presence in this novel, and the descriptions of bullfighting are superb . . . A fine, dramatic, sometimes funny story."—*The Atlantic.* "One of the 'musts' of contemporary novel reading . . . Virtually impossible to put this book down."—ELIZABETH BOWEN. $3.50

Dudley Fitts

The Lysistrata of Aristophanes. A new English version of Aristophanes' great ribald comedy. "The most directly appealing of all the plays . . . the *Lysistrata* deserves understanding and skillful treatment, and this it has happily received at the experienced hands of Dudley Fitts."—MOSES HADAS, *N. Y. Times Book Review* $3.50

Catholicism in America

Essays from The Commonweal "A uniquely significant collection of essays, *Catholicism in America* is in the best tradition of *The Commonweal,* the magazine in which they appeared serially . . . In a time of accentuated conflict between religious groups in America the importance of this *Commonweal* symposium can scarcely be exaggerated." —ERNEST JOHNSON, *N. Y. Times Book Review* $3.75

David Garnett

The Golden Echo. An autobiography. "He sees people with a painter's eye and a painter's delight . . . Beautifully told . . . Everyone who reads it will look forward to its continuation."—EDWIN MUIR, *The Observer.* "A most vital book, thoroughly alive at every point." —HOWARD SPRING. *Illustrated with photographs* $4.00

Erich Maria Remarque

A Time To Love and a Time To Die. A novel acclaimed the "All Quiet" of World War II. "This book is strangely fresh and original. The reason, I am sure, is that Remarque has described not so much the war or the bombings as the crushing of the souls of a people. It is the best book in English on Germany as it must have seemed and felt at the end of the war."—HENRY SEIDEL CANBY, *Book-of-the Month Club News* $3.95

At all bookstores

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

383 Madison Avenue, New York 17

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Princeton UNIVERSITY PRESS

Mimesis

The Representation of Reality in Western Literature

By ERICH AUERBACH, translated by WILLARD R. TRASK

"This is criticism in the finest modern European tradition, in the linguistic tradition of men such as Vossler, Spitzer, Croce, Castro, for whom Europe is a constant interrogation whose literature is ever to be questioned anew, insistently. Erich Auerbach has written in that tradition. . . . It is a staggering act of love."—*The Commonweal.*

574 pages. $7.50

The Structure of Spanish History

By AMERICO CASTRO, translated by EDMUND L. KING

An existentialist view of Spain. This is a revised and enlarged edition of the author's *Espana en su historia,* one of the classics of our time, which the *American Historical Review* called "an epoch-making book, bold and imaginative, on a splendid scholarly foundation, frequently controversial, immensely stimulating." Dr. Castro's search for the essence of Hispanity is an exciting cultural experience which gives a central place to the part played by literature.

703 pages. Illustrated. $9

Blake: Prophet Against Empire

By DAVID V. ERDMAN

"By far the best study to date of Blake's historical allegory. . . . It will prove to be a well-nigh definitive study for a long time. It is the most intensive piece of pure research yet done on Blake's reading and his relation to his age."—*Northrop Frye.*

523 pages. 8 illustrations. $7.50

Order from your bookstore, or
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, Princeton, New Jersey

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Ibérica

For a Free Spain

Honorary Chairmen:
Salvador de Madariaga
Norman Thomas

Editor: Victoria Kent

In June 15 issue:

SALVADOR DE MADARIAGA
MEN AND HISTORY IN SPAIN
An analysis of Primo de Rivera's testament.

VICTOR ALBA
ILLEGAL CULTURE
"Official" and "Unofficial" culture in Spain today.

In July 15 issue:

ALBERT CAMUS
AN ANNIVERSARY
". . . if only the realists will finally realize that Soviet Russia's best ally today is not Spanish communism, but General Franco himself, and his western supporters."

NORMAN THOMAS
WHAT PRICE BASES?
"No single item in American foreign policy is more indicative of its growing dependence upon sheer brute force than our attitude toward Franco's Spain."

UNCENSORED: Confidential reports from official spheres in Madrid.

One Year's Subscription . . . $3.00

Published by:
IBERICA PUBLISHING CO., INC.
112 East 19 Street
New York 3, N. Y.

CONTRIBUTORS

LESLIE A. FIEDLER, who teaches at the University of Montana, is a frequent contributor of fiction and criticism to PR and the literary quarterlies.

JACOB TAUBES teaches social philosophy at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and is now in the United States on a Rockefeller fellowship.

JAMES BALDWIN's first novel, **Go Tell It on the Mountain,** was published last year. He has lived abroad for a number of years.

ERIC BENTLEY, whose most recent book is **In Search of Theater**, and who has been for some time drama critic for the **New Republic**, now teaches at Columbia.

MARTIN GREENBERG is an associate editor of **Commentary**.

HILTON KRAMER is a young writer on art and literature, who lives in New York.

GBM Currents
for Spring and Summer

includes the cream of the season also list of new recordings and "little mags".

GOTHAM BOOK MART
41 WEST 47 ST., N. Y. 36, N. Y. PL 7-0367

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BARRETT **BARZUN** BELLOW

BERRYMAN BISHOP **BLACKMUR**

BOWLES **BURNHAM** CAMUS **CHASE**

CHIAROMONTE CLARK **CONNOLLY**

DAVIS **DOWLING** FIEDLER

FITZGERALD GREENBERG **GREGORY**

HARDWICK **HAUSER** HOOK **HOWE**

JARRELL JÜNGER **KAUFMANN** KAZIN

KLONSKY **LANGGÄSSER** LOGAN

LOWELL McCARTHY **MALRAUX**

MARCUSE **MILOSZ** ORTEGA y GASSET

ORWELL PHILLIPS **PRITCHETT**

RAHV **RANSOM** REED **ROETHKE**

ROSENFELD SCHAPIRO **SCHLESINGER**

THE NEW PARTISAN READER

1945 - 1953

edited by
William Phillips
and
Philip Rahv

A Companion Volume to
The Partisan Reader: 1934-44

"For twenty years Partisan Review has carried a large and important part of the intellectual traffic between America and Western Europe. It has always had the authority which is the reward of the positive and civilized mind. . . . This can be seen by anyone who looks at 'The New Partisan Reader.' "

—V. S. PRITCHETT,
New York Times Book Review

This 640-page anthology contains the best work published in Partisan Review since 1945, some of the finest writing of the modern period: 12 stories, major essays and shorter pieces by 40 writers, and a large section of poetry.

SCHWARTZ SHAPIRO SIMPSON SPENDER STAFFORD STEVENS SWEENEY

VAN GHENT WARSHOW **WATKINS** WISEMAN

L TRILLING D TRILLING TATE

The New Partisan Reader is also available at the special price of $4.50 in combination with a two-year subscription.

The New Partisan Reader retail price	$6.00
One year of PR regular price	$4.00
total	$10.00
SPECIAL COMBINATION OFFER both for	**$8.50**

name .....

street .....

city ..... zone..... state.....

PARTISAN REVIEW, 513 Sixth Ave., New York 11

Published by
Harcourt, Brace & Co.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PR PARTISAN REVIEW

EDITORS:
William Phillips, Philip Rahv

ASSOCIATE EDITORS:
William Barrett, Delmore Schwartz

MANAGING EDITOR:
Catharine Carver

ADVERTISING AND BUSINESS MANAGER:
Barbara Greenfeld

ADVISORY BOARD:
Allan D. Dowling, Sidney Hook,
James Johnson Sweeney, Lionel Trilling

PARTISAN REVIEW is published bi-monthly by the Foundation for Cultural Projects, Inc. at 513 Sixth Ave., New York 11, N. Y. Subscriptions: $4 a year, $6.50 for two years, foreign subscriptions, including Canada, $4.50 a year, $7.50 for two years. All payments from foreign countries must be made by U.S. money orders or checks payable in U.S. currency or with $0.75 added for collection charges. Single copy: $0.75. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes. Copyright July-August, 1954, by PARTISAN REVIEW. Reentered as second-class matter, May 19, 1950, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y. under the act of March 3, 1879.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JULY-AUGUST, 1954 VOLUME XXI, NUMBER 4

CONTENTS

PULL DOWN VANITY! Leslie A. Fiedler 361

LETTERS ABOUT WRITERS AND WRITING, Anton Chekhov 371

STILL LIFE WITH VILLEINS AND IRIS, Mac Hammond 386

FROM CULT TO CULTURE, Jacob Taubes 387

AFTER THE CENTURY, Barbara Guest 400

POSTURES, GESTURES, Helen Forman 401

PARIS LETTER, James Baldwin 402

THEATER CHRONICLE, Eric Bentley 411

BOOKS

McCARTHY AND HIS APOLOGISTS, Dwight Macdonald 418

A TALL EPIGRAM, Martin Greenberg 424

GOD'S COUNTRY AND MR. KRONENBERGER, Arthur Schlesinger Jr. 426

PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM LIMBO, Hilton Kramer 432

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BACK ISSUES OF PR

now available at reduced prices—30c each (regular price 60c)
Any four of the following for $1.00

22 OCTOBER 1949: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.—**The Causes of the Civil War**; Louis Martin-Chauffier—**Proust and the Double "I"**; Angus Wilson—**Two Stories**; Irving Howe—**O'Hara in Samarra.**

23 NOVEMBER 1949: Albert Camus—**Between Yes and No**; Saul Bellow—**From the Life of Augie March**; Elizabeth Hardwick—**Elizabeth Bowen's Fiction**; Clement Greenberg—**Our Period Style.**

24 DECEMBER 1949: José Ortega y Gasset—**In Search of Goethe from Within**; Allen Tate—**Our Cousin, Mr. Poe**; Leslie A. Fiedler—**Montana, or the End of Jean Jacques Rousseau**; Delmore Schwartz—**Views of a Second Violinist.**

25 JANUARY 1950: Arthur Mizener—**Scott Fitzgerald**; James Burnham—**The Suicidal Mania of American Business**; Alfred Kazin—**On Melville as Scripture.**

28 APRIL 1950: Diana Trilling—**Men, Women and Sex**; William Barrett—**T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party;"** Elizabeth Hardwick—**The Friendly Witness** (a story); W. H. Auden— **Oscar Wilde.**

30 JULY-AUGUST 1950: Marcel Aymé—**Crossing Paris** (a story); Geoffrey Gorer—**The Erotic Myth of America**; Raymond Aron—**Politics and the French Intellectuals.**

31 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1950: Randall Jarrell—**The Profession of Poetry**; Hollis Alpert—**Philadelphia: Plans and Pigeons**; Erich Auerbach—**The World of Rabelais.**

32 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1950: Marie Bonaparte—**Poe and "The Black Cat"**; Saul Bellow—**The Trip to Galena** (a story); George Barker, Horace Gregory, Robert Lowell—**Three long poems.**

33 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1951: Arthur Koestler—**The Age of Longing** (a story) ; Harvey Breit—**A Sense of Faulkner**; Randall Jarrell—**The Obscurity of the Poet**; Delmore Schwartz—**The Grapes of Crisis.**

34 MARCH-APRIL 1951: James Agee—**The Morning Watch** (a short novel); Sidney Hook—**Philosophy and/or Agony**; Stephen Spender—**Reflections on the Literary Life.**

35 MAY-JUNE 1951: Elizabeth Hardwick—**A Florentine Conference** (a story); William Barrett—**Fitzgerald and America**; Erich Auerbach—**Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert.**

36 JULY-AUGUST 1951: Andre Gide—**Two Declarations**; Diana Trilling—**A Communist and His Ideals**; Eleanor Clark—**The Fountains of Rome**; Louis Auchincloss—**Edith Wharton and Her New Yorks.**

38 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1951: Saul Bellow—**The Einhorns** (a story); William Barrett—**American Fiction and American Values**; Raymond Aron —**The Leninist Myth of Imperialism.**

ALSO: All bi-monthly issues for 1952, with exception of January-February.

PARTISAN REVIEW, 513 Sixth Avenue, New York 11, N. Y.

I enclose ..... for the following back issues (insert numbers below)

NAME_____

STREET_____

CITY_____ ZONE_____ STATE_____

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SÖREN

Kierkegaard

The biography of a genius

By Johannes Hohlenberg. The first complete *Life* of Kierkegaard as a man and a philosopher, by a Danish scholar intimately acquainted with the people, places, and ideas of Kierkegaard's life and work. *Illustrated, $5.00 at all bookstores.* PANTHEON BOOKS, *333 Sixth Ave., N. Y. 14.*

THE ARTS AT MID-CENTURY

Edited by ROBERT RICHMAN

●

In this comprehensive volume the various arts in our time throughout America and Europe are thoroughly explored by such authorities as Herbert Read, Archibald MacLeish, John Crowe Ransom, Eric Bentley, Nicola Chiaromonte, Wallace Fowlie, Kenneth Rexroth, Delmore Schwartz, Allen Tate, Malcolm Cowley, Arthur Mizener, Elizabeth Bowen, Stephen Spender, Mark Schorer and many others.

$5.00

●

HORIZON PRESS

220 West 42nd Street, New York 36

PERSPECTIVES USA 8

A Partial Table of Contents

The Liberation	JEAN STAFFORD
Music in Two Worlds	VICTOR ZUCKERKANDL
The Skyskraper: USA	WILLIAM ALEX
Generations of Leaves	ROBERT FITZGERALD
The Long Stay Cut Short	TENNESSEE WILLIAMS
The Young Man Washington	SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON
The Person in a Technical Society	PAUL J. TILLICH

Poetry — KENNETH PATCHEN — WALLACE STEVENS

Book Reviews — HAYDEN CARRUTH, SEYMOUR KRIM, NANCY W. ROSS

192 Pages — 16 Illustrations — Price $1.50 — Annually: $5.00

Published by Intercultural Publications Inc., 477 Madison Ave., N. Y. 22. Address subscription orders to Paragon Mailing Service, 1 Lefferts Ave., Brooklyn 25, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOLLINGEN SERIES
1954

XX THE COLLECTED WORKS OF C. G. JUNG

Translated by R. F. C. Hull.

Vol. 16: THE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

Jung's most important essays on general questions of analytical therapy and on the specific subjects of the transference, abreaction, and dream analysis. Illustrated. 6″ x 9″. 392 pages. *$4.50*

XXX PAPERS FROM THE ERANOS YEARBOOKS

Translated by Ralph Manheim and R. F. C. Hull.

Vol. 1: SPIRIT AND NATURE

Lectures chosen from among those delivered annually at the Eranos meetings, at Ascona, Switzerland. In the first volume of this series, twelve distinguished international scholars discuss the theme from within the framework of their various disciplines. Illustrated. 6″ x 9″. 500 pages. *$4.50*

XL EGYPTIAN RELIGIOUS TEXTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

Vol. 1: THE TOMB OF RAMESSES VI

The walls and ceilings of this tomb, at Thebes, contain a unique collection of cosmological and astronomical texts. These texts are here translated with introductions by Alexandre Piankoff, under the editorship of N. Rambova, who has also supervised the complete recording of the tomb in photographs.

9″ x 12″. 195 collotype plates. 2 vols., boxed. *$27.50*

XLII THE ORIGINS AND HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

By Erich Neumann. Translated by R. F. C. Hull. A new and creative interpretation of the relation between psychology and mythology, by a distinguished Jungian analyst. It describes the passage of both individual consciousness and that of the human race through the same archetypal stages. Illustrated.

6″ x 9″. 500 pages. *$5.00*

DISTRIBUTED BY PANTHEON BOOKS, INC., 333 SIXTH AVE., N. Y. 14
For detailed catalogue write to Bollingen Series, 140 E. 62 St., N. Y. 21

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Leslie A. Fiedler

PULL DOWN VANITY!

Actually, I admire Edward Fenton greatly—more I am sure than he can possibly deserve, for I have a weakness for his kind of deliberately annoying literary criticism; and yet for a long time I have wished him dead. Which does not quite explain, of course, why in the beginning I should have claimed to have seven children, and why in the end I lay beside Judith Somers limp though without shame; but it is, at least, a way to start—and for me that is always the most difficult thing of all.

For over twenty years Edward Fenton has been dying—dying, we have grown accustomed to say, young—though he is by now nearing sixty and the shadow of his death has hung over all of us since we can remember, an absurdly disproportionate threat that has come finally to seem a critical event (precisely because it does not *happen*) in the history of our recent literature. What young writer has not received immediately after his first publication, one of those familiar appeals through the mail from some *ad hoc* committee to support Edward Fenton; and who has not read Fenton's own scandalously inept verses (awarded a prize by *Poetry* last year—for purely sentimental reasons) on his treacherous heart and his much-advertised five children.

Nearly three years ago, I completed my own definitive essay on Fenton, which I call "Edward Lear as T. S. Eliot," and which can only appear after his death. Certainly, while he is living I would do nothing that might seem aimed at currying favor with the man who described my second book of verse, *Defeats and Empathies* (he had ignored the first completely), as "limp, hypothyroid, excruciatingly well-behaved." I am unaffected by personal spite, so that you will understand how objectively I am able to say (my essay is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

good—I know it!) that I can scarcely wait for Fenton to die. In most ways, of course, one could only wish that the author of "Ronald Firbank, a Female Jane Austen" and "Tennyson After Dachau" might live, and write, forever!

At any rate, I had not expected to meet Fenton at Darlington College, when I agreed to take part in their Writers' Conference. I do not accuse the planners of the conference of fraud in this regard, for they could surely not be expected to know my complicated feeling about the man; and they must have mentioned his name (proudly, I suppose) in one of those long, chatty letters which they kept sending me before the Conference, and which, naturally enough, I never opened. In any case, I would have had to go—finding in the prospect of living at close quarters with Fenton for nearly two weeks only one more misery to add to those "laboratory sessions" I had agreed to hold with the full coven of southern Missouri poets. And this, too, in mid-July! I could foresee it all, the withered ladies in their backless dresses, the requests for autographs, and, final indignity, the query as to what I thought of Ezra Pound!

I am not brave—only frantically, shyly aggressive—but I needed money badly; and so I had felt obliged to make a public appearance for the first time in my life as a writer. Ever since I fled from New York in 1936, I have been teaching literature at that combination dude ranch and prep school in southern Texas, now familiar to the half-million readers of my ex-wife's discouragingly successful novel, *Love Among the Cactus*. The scene in which the wife of an English instructor (guess who?) and her fifteen-year-old lover tenderly pick cactus spines out of each other's rear ends has by this time become a standard item in the repertory of radio comedians and night-club entertainers; but when I arrived in Darlington, the book had not yet appeared. It had, however, already been accepted by a publisher, whose hysterical letters of praise had helped my wife make up her mind, after fourteen years of threats and feints, finally to leave me; though, indeed, it was I who had encouraged her in the first place to send out her mindlessly flamboyant manuscript.

At any rate, our divorce proceedings were about to begin, and I was just becoming aware of the expenses involved. But all this, you must realize, was still completely unknown. I, who am now a byword like Peaches Browning's Daddy or the kidnaper of the Lind-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bergh baby, was then something of a mystery; for I had never even taken part in the intimate, nervous cannibalism of New York literary life, and the few facts available about me from my own poems (I had been a tail gunner in a B-29; I played tournament golf; I had learned to break horses) were probably not believed.

Certainly, Chuck Bligh, the organizer of the Conference, had been pleased and a little incredulous, as he came forward to shake my hand. "Well, well, Milton," he said, pretending not to notice my grimace in his scurrying to pump my hand, pat me on the back, and push up a chair behind me all at once, "Well, well—"

"It depresses me to be called by my first name," I told him, as indeed it does—reminding me at once of my obligations to the muse ("that one talent which is death to hide") and of my foolish mother. The boys at school call me in friendly mockery "Tex"; and in the Air Corps I was, incredibly enough, called seriously by that nickname; to myself I am simply Amsterdam. "And when I get depressed, I review the poetry of my friends."

"Very good. Very good, Amsterdam. I told Ed Fenton here that you'd answered none of my letters after the first, and Ed," he kept emphasizing the "Ed" like a reproach, "has been saying you'd never come. Didn't you, Ed?"

I turned to look in the direction indicated by Bligh's limp hand—and there was Fenton perched on the edge of a desk, grinning at me with unexpectedly robust malice. "Didn't think you'd dare face the Old Master in person, Milton. I've been telling little Judy here," he reached over to pat the cheek of Bligh's secretary who was scarlet with embarrassment and pride at being part of so distinguished a group, "that you'd crap out for sure. You're certainly *prettier* than I expected, though. Christ, you're prettier than the young Edna Millay —although she wasn't Jewish at all, was she?" He looked around in pretended bewilderment, as if for an answer; and bending over toward the secretary who was mumbling something confused, almost pushed his nose into the crease between her pale, flagrant breasts. Even in my annoyance at my own dumbness before Fenton (Why did he talk like that? so differently from the involuted, sly style of his essays!), I could not help feeling how attractive she was—her extraordinarily fair skin not white but silver, dusted over with a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

barely visible fuzz of golden hair, and those plump breasts so obviously constrained by the low-cut summer dress. I could scarcely keep from touching her.

"Judy says Edna was Irish, Milton," he informed me gravely. "She's a bright girl, our Judith—not the mere office slavey she seems. She's working for a degree in philosophy—and she writes poetry, too." He kept staring at the girl who squirmed satisfactorily under his quizzical glance. "You may be interested to learn that her favorite poet is Milton Amsterdam—and quite right, too. Don't you think he's pretty, Judith?"

His mere appearance had surprised and distressed me—the animal healthiness of the presumably dying man behind the ragged musketeer's beard that made him look so different from the clean-shaven, tough, pathetic youth of the unchanging portrait on all his book jackets. He was wearing a pair of outrageously dirty seersucker pants, too long for his bandy legs, and a tight green sport shirt open far enough down to reveal the mat of dirty gray hair on his chest. He seemed all aging muscle and ragged hair and boisterous malice.

"Come now, come now! You *do* think he's pretty, don't you? Let's not be shy, baby!"

"I like him," she managed to say in a muted, pleasantly raucous voice. She did not look at me.

"She likes you, boy. Don't you think he looks like Truman Capote—something soft and charmingly rotten—gothic—"

"Oh, *no*!" she protested; but I did not trouble to add my own dissent, the comparison was so mischievously pointless. My wife, in our happier moments, used to tell me that I resembled the actor John Garfield—a comparison I have never particularly relished, but one whose justice I have to recognize. "An east side Truman Capote—" Fenton persisted; and as I made my first effort to speak, he rose and walked over to me, clasping me in a sudden show of affection about the shoulders. "Milton, I've been meaning to write to you for months. I like your newer stuff—that curtail sonnet of yours, 'The Plangence of the Beloved'—it's the best short poem since Emily Dickinson!"

"I don't even know what a curtail sonnet is," I managed to say, thinking that he had probably made up the term to annoy me; but I regretted immediately my awkward protest.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't be churlish, boy! We all love you." He drew me to him, breathing his old, thin, whisky-soured breath into my face, and pulling Judith up with the other arm to complete a symbolic group. "We all love each other—we Chosen People. No *goyim* here. I speak spiritually, of course."

I was too exasperated by then even to wonder if his compulsive anti-Semitism were real or merely a cold device to betray me into anger; and anyhow Judith was leaning forward across his chest, looking at me for the first time. Her eyes were astonishingly black under the pallid high forehead, the silver blond hair woven into two thick braids; a furry wet black, as if she were at the point of weeping, or had just reopened them after some splendid climax of desire.

"I wouldn't have known you were Jewish—I mean, not from your looks," she said indistinctly, disengaging herself from Fenton; but she blushed as she said it, and when I did not answer, added, "Excuse me!"

Meanwhile, however, Chuck Bligh had introduced himself between Fenton and me, laying a palm on each of our shoulders, and crying out in obvious contentment, "But just wait till you meet the others— There's Miss Manfred, she's Commercial Fiction—and Fleetwood Demby, the novelist, you'll like *him*! I can't tell you what it means to hear some real intellectual talk again after the cultural fast of the winter. Real Talk! We must have some more! After a day with the old biddies, sweating over hot poetry and criticism all day," he laughed weakly at his own joke, "we can relax over a glass of beer, let down our hair."

"I don't drink beer," I said.

"And I," Fenton winked broadly at all of us, "consider it a more important part of my duties to relax with some of the younger writers after the formal sessions. Malt does more than Milton can—" He walked over to the desk where Judith had sat down again before a typewriter, leaning over until his mean, greenish eyes were on a level with hers. She laid one hand, a little awkward and too large, over the exposed part of her breast, as if to shield it. "I made my attitude on this point clear in one of my letters to you, Bligh."

"Naturally, naturally," Bligh answered. "And now for the forms —no America without wood-pulp you know." With a great pretense of contempt, he fell to the administrative detail. And it was then that I made my absurd and pointless claim.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I suppose it was Judith's conventional exclamation of admiring wonder when Fenton announced the number of his own children which did the mischief. "Five!" she had said, drawing down the corners of her odd mouth, at once old-fashionedly innocent and wicked, like something out of Rossetti or Swinburne. "Five! well I never!"

I felt, or imagined I could feel her moved dimly, sexually by such evidence of potency, and I said, "I have seven."

"Seven what?" Fenton asked, as everyone laughed. "Persian cats?" Now, oddly enough, the only living thing over whose custody my wife and I fought on parting was a Siamese cat of which she is obscenely fond. My own feeling about animals is rather like my attitude toward children, which is to say, a sense of manfully controlled nausea; and I had made trouble over the beast for the trouble's sake. But at that instant, among the tax blanks, I had found myself wishing with all the passion of a child itself, longing for the treat he has scornfully rejected for reasons he can no longer remember, that I had had children—many of them! "No, really, seven children. 'Seven infant darlings of a pigmy size.' I try to keep it dark—it's a little embarrassing."

I produced from my wallet the picture I had taken last year, standing with my sister, Mae, in the midst of her (really) seven kids. It is all doctrinal with Mae; when she was still a Communist (it was she who had talked me into joining briefly in '36 and I have never forgiven her), she had four or five husbands and no children; but now, having recognized the values of bourgeois life, she is living in Kansas City and has brought forth seven infant horrors in the midst of finishing a long study proving the wisdom of John Quincy Adams's rebuttal of Tom Paine. "Seven. 'Seven lillies in one garland wrought.' "

Judith, who had taken the photograph in hand, sighing, moved over to the window into the light. "Seven! How cute they are! What are they called?"

"I'm afraid it would just bore you."

"No, really." And when I kept stubbornly silent, "I have just one of my own—a girl named Susan who's only ten months old, but people take her for at least a year and a half, she's so big!" I felt a sudden pang at learning that she was married and a mother;

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

though I could not have said precisely why, I had the sense of having been somehow deceived.

Certainly, I had no intention of saying anything further to her or anyone else there; and the rest, too, seemed unwilling to talk. Even Fenton had apparently been overwhelmed by the insolence of my claim, and Bligh dismayed by Fenton's silence.

"And your wife," Judith went on nervously, "I would have guessed she would look like that. Wouldn't you have just known it, Chuck? She's so pretty!" She said it smugly, out of the security of her own superior beauty, but without malice—in simple condescension.

Mae is, of course, anything but good-looking, though there is something warm and thickly sensual about her that appeals especially to gentiles. My former wife, Eileen, on the other hand, is a real *shiksa,* who possessed once and still possesses, I guess, a kind of bloodless, nervous charm—to which I had fled as another aspect of that anti-New York America, that utopia of non-Jewishness defined by rodeos and ranch-type houses with picture windows. But all this you will doubtless understand if you have read my long poem in dactyls, "Passover in Santa Fe."

"Seven children. I never thought you had it in you. Congratulations, boy." Fenton had shaken his head doubtfully, looking from my gum-soled pale blue tennis shoes, up the precise crease of my linen pants to the dandyish cowboy shirt with the discreetly embroidered yoke. I could see he despised me for refusing to look like the writers of his generation, to whom their sloppy rags had seemed the uniform of a disorder they called freedom. "You must be very happily married."

"I am," I answered, pretending to ignore the wink which he directed over my shoulder to Judith. "I am!"

Judith, meanwhile, had pretended to busy herself at the filing cabinet near the door, and lifting her head only a little as we passed her on the way out, she whispered to me,"I hate him, too!"

Her hands were too big, her waist too thick, her mouth merely petulant, I told myself; and she was stupid, hopelessly stupid, with her coos of admiration over my supposed family. But I knew that she was the most beautiful girl I had ever met, and I was annoyed at wanting her for so banal a reason. How sure I had been during

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the weeks before that I was tired of women forever, their ambitions and exactions, their softness and darkness—the whole pointless expenditure of their pursuit and possession.

The Conference turned out to be almost precisely what I had expected—and yet in the end, unforeseen, unforeseeable. The clean and odorless old ladies who had turned to poetry after the death of their husbands and the marriage of their children were overwhelmingly there, scarcely perspiring in the intolerable heat that made the sweat roll down into my eyes as I stood before them. But though I had known exactly the kind of verse they would write, I had not known how abjectly they would welcome my bitter remarks on their ineptness; or how, coming to me at a session's end, they would confess their ignorance and misguided taste in an almost voluptuous surrender. Their eyes would shine as they watched my nervous movements perched on the corner of a desk; and meeting me by the coke machine in the corridor, they would ask timidly if it were really true that I had seven children; then turning to each other, would say back and forth, "Seven! Would you believe it! How young he is, how young!"

To be so loved and admired was for me an almost unbearable shame. I could not help feeling that I was profiting somehow by an elaborate hoax; that not only my seven children, but the whole self they saw was an illusion. My mother had always hated me for reasons I could never fathom, and during my adolescence I had not been particularly successful with girls, while to my wife I had been only a snobbish acquisition, a second-hand approach to literary greatness, abandoned when her own book had been accepted.

But that summer I could overhear on all sides the whispers intended to be overheard on my seven children, my beauty and my wit. At my least quip the room of fifty or sixty "writers," almost all women, would rock with disproportionate laughter; and the simplest exegesis of the most obvious line was received with the startled sighs of a revelation. After a while, I even began to believe (I admit it without shame—you know the cruel, half-true things a woman tells a man she is about to divorce; and I *needed* consolation) that perhaps I had all along been as witty, charming and mythically potent as these miserable women had to believe.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

And behind it all, there was Judith Somers, a kind of *agent provocateur,* who would cue and sustain the hum of admiration with a whispered comment, a sigh or simple look, coming breathless into class every day between her two jobs as waitress and part-time secretary to Chuck Bligh. Edging down the side of the room to the back row after I had already begun to talk, she would keep her eyes on me in such frank adoration that I could scarcely keep from writhing in pride, embarrassment and rage.

After class, my poets would follow me to the dormitory room where I held my conferences, wait patiently in the corridor, chattering excitedly in groups of three or four, until the moment when they could sit and watch me across the littered desk and beside the neatly made bed. There would always be a "problem" to begin with, a question of metrics or vocabulary, then some banal confidence, and at last the moment of silence in which they would gaze at me with the flattering tenderness that I despised myself for enjoying. In these intervals of quiet I would sometimes hear from next door the creaking of the floor, or the rustling of cloth against wood, and I would know that Fenton, who was my neighbor, was listening at the connecting door. I should have sympathized with him, I know, but I was capable then only of feeling flattered because he was jealous of me and old and aware of being unloved.

He was constantly wooing the conferees, at first only the handful of younger poets, but later even the biddies themselves, to sit with him over a beer and be shocked by him a little in those unbreathable evenings that brought neither coolness nor the possibility of sleep. But somehow they would not come, or sat dully in their transparent boredom, so that finally he was driven back on the company of the Staff: Chuck Bligh who listened to nothing in his undefined general pleasure in Good Conversation; Miss Manfred, who had come to teach the "commercial" short story, and who seemed at first simply mad, though it turned out that she was only acting frantically some provincial version of the flapper maintained for thirty years; and Fleetwood Demby, author of that sensitive first novel, *Death's Other Kingdom,* whose purple eyes would watch Fenton with horror from behind his bangs.

I met all three one night just outside of the Campus Grille, Fenton apparently quite drunk and hanging for support between

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Demby and Miss Manfred. I tried not to see him, for I did not feel equal to his contempt, my head blurry as always when I emerged from the false paradise of the air-conditioning into the stifling night; and so I drew back into the group of young graduate students, assistants in English, philosophy and political science, with whom I had picked up the habit of sitting every night in the Campus Grille. We would argue literature or politics (most of them were incredibly Young Progressives!), the way it is possible to argue such matters when you are young, as if they finally mattered; and afterwards we would break up into smaller groups, still talking and talking in the heat that would not break. It was Judith who had asked me the first time; and her husband would stop by to call for me every evening—a tall, broad, silent boy, a little older than some of the others, with the sort of face one might expect to find in a tough working-class bar, but in his case, subtilized and ruined by an unlooked-for pallor. He would scarcely talk to me, whether in shyness or resentment I could not tell; merely knock at the door, and stand there when I opened it, with his air of having come on someone else's errand, wait wordlessly until I joined him for the long walk to join the others.

But Fenton refused to let me slip by unchallenged; and after the obligatory exchange of hellos between the two groups, the students had dropped back into the darkness, leaving me with the three neon-lighted others, who began talking at me all at once. I had the sense of one who moves back and forth over enemy lines.

"Is that oversize one Hank Somers?" Fenton asked in a thick conspiratorial voice, leaning forward so that his face almost touched mine, and his full weight was on the shoulders of his companions. "Our Judy's husband?"

"Please, darling, you're creasing my lapel," Demby protested.

"For Christ sake, don't call me darling, it reminds me of my wife."

"Yes, darling, whatever you say." Demby lisped a little, in genteel spite.

"I think you're a darling, too," Miss Manfred cut in, making certain intendedly kittenish motions with her eyes and her hands, "an *old* darling." She laid considerable weight on the "old," though

(*Continued on page* 435)

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Anton Chekhov

LETTERS ABOUT WRITERS AND WRITING*

To Ivan Leontiev (Shcheglov)[1]

May 3, 1888, Moscow

Dear Alba,

. . . I sent a story to the *Northern Herald* and am slightly ashamed of it. Very dull and dripping with fancy philosophy. I hated to do it, but had to, for we run through money like water. Tomorrow I am finishing a story for *New Time*. All summer I'll be writing only small things.

I had a letter from Lehman: he informs that "we" (i.e., all of you St. Petersburgers) "have agreed to carry announcements of one another's works in our books," invites me to concur in this proposal and warns that "only those persons more or less *in solidarity* with us" can be included in this elite. In reply I sent my consent and inquired as to how he knew who was or was not in solidarity with me. How smug all of you are in St. Pete! Don't tell me you aren't all oppressed by such words as solidarity, the unity of young writers, community of interest, and so on? Solidarity and such stuff I understand on the stock exchange, in politics, in religious affairs (of a sect), etc., but solidarity in young literary men is impossible and unnecessary. We cannot think and feel the same way, our aims are various or nonexistent, we know one another slightly or not at all, and so there isn't anything to which this solidarity might fasten itself securely. Is there any need for it? No. To lend a helping hand to one's colleague, to respect his personality and labors, not to gossip about him or envy him, not to lie or play the hypocrite before him—

* This group of letters is from *Selected Letters of Anton Chekhov*, edited by Lillian Hellman and translated by Sidonie Lederer, which Farrar, Straus & Young will bring out next year.

1 Ivan Leontiev (1856-1911) was a playwright and novelist who used the pen name of Shcheglov.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to act thus you've got to be not so much the young literary figure as just a plain human being. Let us be ordinary people, let us adopt the same attitude toward all and then an artificially wrought solidarity is not needed. This persistent striving to set up the private, professional, solid little group that you people want, would only mean unconscious spying on one another and suspicion and control; and without meaning to, we would turn ourselves into something like a Jesuit society. I am not in solidarity with you, dear Jan, but I promise you to the death full freedom as a writer; i.e., you can write where and how you like . . . change your convictions and tendencies 1,000 times, and so forth and so on, but my human relations with you will not change one iota, and I'll always print announcements of your books in mine. I can promise the same to all my other colleagues, and would wish the same for myself. To my way of thinking these are the most normal relations. It is only thus that we can have mutual respect and even friendship, and compassion in life's bitter moments.

However, I have let my tongue run away with me. God keep you!

Your A. Chekhov

To Alexei Pleshcheyev[2]

October 4, 1888, Moscow

. . . I would be glad to read what Merejkowski[3] has to say. In the meantime, good-by for now. Write me once you have read my story. You won't like it, but I am not afraid of you, nor of Anna Mikhailovna. Those I am afraid of are the ones who look for tendencies between the lines and want to put me down definitely as a liberal or conservative. I am not a liberal and not a conservative, not an evolutionist, nor a monk, nor indifferent to the world. I would like to be a free artist—and that is all—and regret that God has not given me the strength to be one. I hate lies and coercion in all their aspects. . . . Pharisaism, stupidity and idle whim reign not only in the homes of the merchant class and within prison walls; I see

2 Alexei Pleshcheyev (1825-1893) was a poet and essayist, and an early admirer of Chekhov's.

3 Merejkowski, the author of *The Life of Leonardo Da Vinci,* in 1888 wrote an article, "An Old Question on New Talent," about Chekhov's short stories.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

them in science, in literature, amongst young people. I cannot therefore nurture any particularly warm feelings toward policemen, butchers, savants, writers, or youth. I consider trademarks or labels to be prejudices.

My holy of holies are the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom—freedom from force and falsity, in whatever form these last may be expressed. This is the program I would maintain, were I a great artist.

However, I've run on too much as it is. Keep well,

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

To Alexei Suvorin[4]

January 7, 1889, Moscow

. . . I would with great pleasure read an essay before the Literary Society on whence came the idea of writing *Ivanov*. I would make a public confession. I have long cherished the audacious notion of summing up all that has hitherto been written about complaining and melancholy people, and would have my Ivanov proclaim the ultimate in such writing. It seems to me that all Russian novelists and playwrights have felt a need to depict the mournful man and that they have all written instinctively, without having definite images or a point of view. I tried consciously to get on the right track, and practically did so, but my manner of presentation is not worth a hoot in hell. It would have been much better to wait! I rejoice that I did not heed Grigorovich's advice two or three years ago and write a novel! I can imagine how much good stuff I would have spoiled if I had listened to him. He says "talent and freshness will overcome everything." Talent and freshness can spoil a great deal—that would be more true. Besides an abundance of material and talent, other qualities of no less importance are also required. What you must have is maturity—that's one; second, you must have a *feeling of personal freedom,* and this feeling began kindling within me only a short time ago. I hadn't had it previously; frivolity, carelessness and lack of respect for my work had successfully served instead.

4 Alexei Suvorin (1834-1912) was the editor of the powerful, conservative, St. Petersburg newspaper, *New Time*. His friendship with Chekhov broke up in a quarrel over Zola and the Dreyfus case.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Self-made intellectuals buy at the price of their youth what gently born and bred writers have been endowed with by nature. Go ahead and write a story about a young man, the son of a serf, an ex-small shopkeeper, a choir boy, high school and university student, brought up on respect for rank, kissing priests' hands, and the worship of others' ideas, offering thanks for every mouthful of bread, often whipped, going to school without shoes, fighting, torturing animals, fond of dining with rich relatives, playing the hypocrite before God and people without any cause, except out of a consciousness of his own insignificance—then tell how this young man presses the slave out of himself one drop at a time and how he wakes up one fine morning to feel that in his veins flows not the blood of a slave, but real human blood.

. . . Keep well then, and forgive the long letter.

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

To ALEXEI PLESHCHEYEV

February 15, 1890, Moscow

. . . You really didn't like the *Kreutzer Sonata*? I won't say it is a work of genius, or a work for all eternity, for I am no judge of these matters, but in my opinion, amongst the mass of things being written here and abroad, you will hardly find anything its equal in seriousness of conception and beauty of execution, not to mention its artistic merits, which in spots are astounding. You must thank the story for just the one point that it is extremely thought-provoking. As I read it I could hardly keep myself from exclaiming, "That's true!" or "That's ridiculous!" Of course it does have some very annoying defects. Besides those you enumerated, there is still another point that one won't readily forgive its author, to wit, Tolstoy's stubborn brashness in treating of things he doesn't know and doesn't understand. Thus, his pronouncements on syphilis, foundling homes, women's repugnance to cohabitation and so on are not only debatable but also show him to be an ignoramus who has never taken the trouble during the course of his long life to read two or three books written by specialists. Still, these defects fly like feathers before the wind; considering the story's great qualities you just do not notice them, or if you do, it is only to be peeved that the story did not

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

avoid the fate of all works created by man, none of which are perfect or free from error.

So my Petersburg friends and acquaintances are all angry with me? Why? Because I didn't bore them much with my presence, which has been a bore to myself for so long! Calm their minds, tell them that I ate a lot of dinners and suppers there, but did not captivate a *single* lady, that every day I felt sure I would be leaving on that evening's express, but that I was detained by my friends and *The Marine Miscellany* which I had to leaf through in its entirety, going back to 1852. I did as much in one month in St. Pete as my young friends would not be able to do in a year. However, let them rave! . . .

. . . Good-by, dear fellow, please pay us a visit. Regards to your family. My sister and mother send their compliments.

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

To ALEXEI SUVORIN

September 8, 1891, Moscow
M. Dmitrovka, c/o Firgang

I have already moved to Moscow and am staying indoors. . . .

"The Lie," the title you recommended for my long story, won't do. It would be appropriate only in cases where the lie is a conscious one. An unconscious lie really isn't a lie, but an error. Having money and eating meat Tolstoy calls a lie—which is going too far.

Yesterday I was informed that Kurepin is hopelessly ill with cancer of the neck. Before he dies the cancer will have eaten up half his head and torment him with neuralgic pains. I was told his wife has written you.

Little by little death takes its toll. It knows its job. Try writing a play along these lines: an old chemist has concocted an elixir of immortality—a dose of 15 drops and one lives eternally; but the chemist breaks the vial with the elixir out of fear that such carrion as he and his wife will continue to live forever. Tolstoy denies immortality to mankind, but good God, how much there is that's personal in his denial! The day before yesterday I read his "Epilogue."[5] Strike

5 The "Epilogue" to Tolstoy's *Kreutzer Sonata.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

me dead, but this is stupider and stuffier than "Letters to a Governor's Wife,"[6] which I despise. The hell with the philosophy of the great of this world! All eminent sages are as despotic as generals, as discourteous and lacking in delicacy as generals, because they know they are safe from punishment. Diogenes spat into peoples' beards, sure that nothing would happen to him; Tolstoy abuses doctors as scoundrels and shows his ignorance in regard to weighty questions because he is another Diogenes, whom you can't take to the police station or call down in the newspapers. And so, the hell with the philosophy of the great of this world! All of it, with all its beggarly epilogues and letters to governors' ladies, isn't worth a single filly in his "Story of a Horse."

. . . Keep well and don't forget this miserable sinner. I miss you very much.

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

TO ELENA SHAVROVA[7]

September 16, 1891, Moscow

So we old bachelors smell like dogs? Very well, but let me dispute your thesis that specialists in women's diseases are Lotharios and cynics at heart. Gynecologists are concerned with a kind of violent prose you have never even dreamed of, and to which, were you aware of it, you would attribute an odor even worse than that of dogs, with the harshness characteristic of your imagination. He who always sails the seas loves dry land; he who is eternally absorbed in prose passionately pines for poetry. All gynecologists are idealists. Your doctor reads verses, and your instinct has served you well; I would add that he is a great liberal, something of a mystic, and muses of a wife along the lines of Nekrasov's Russian Woman. The eminent Snegirev never speaks of "the Russian woman" without a tremor in his voice. Another gynecologist I know is in love with a mysterious unknown who wears a veil, and whom he has seen from a distance. Still another attends all the first nights—and stands next to

6 By Gogol.

7 Elena Shavrova (1847-1937) was a writer and actress. She met Chekhov in 1889 and asked him to read a story she had written.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the coatroom swearing loudly and assuring people that authors haven't the right to depict women who aren't ideal, etc.

You have also lost sight of the fact that a good gynecologist cannot be stupid or a mediocrity. His mind, even if it has had only moderate training, shines more brightly than his bald spot; you, however, noticed the bald spot and stressed it and threw the mind overboard. You noted and stressed as well that a kind of grease oozes out of this fat man—brrr!—and completely lost sight of the fact that he is a professor, i.e., has thought and done things for some years that set him above millions of people, above all the little Veras and Taganrog Greek young ladies, above all meals and wines. Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and, I think, Japheth. The only thing Ham noted was that his father was a drunkard, he completely lost sight of the fact that Noah was a genius, that he built an ark and saved the world. Writing people ought not imitate Ham. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. I don't dare ask you to be fond of gynecologists and professors, but I venture to remind you of justice, which is more precious than air to the objective writer.

The little girl in the merchant's family is done beautifully. The passage in the doctor's speech where he talks of his disbelief in medicine is good, but it isn't necessary for him to take a drink after every sentence. The fondness for corpses shows your exasperation with your captive thought. You have not seen corpses.

Now to move from the particular to the general. Let me advise you to watch your step. What you have here is not a short story or a novel, not a piece of artistry, but a long row of heavy, dismal barracks.

Where is the architectural construction that once so enchanted your humble servant? Where is the airiness, the freshness, the grace? Read your story through: a description of a dinner, then a description of passing women and misses,—then a description of a party,—then one of a dinner . . . and so on and on—endlessly. Descriptions, descriptions and more descriptions—and no action at all. You should start right off with the merchant's daughter, stick to her, and throw out the little Veras, throw out the Greek girls, throw out everything . . . except for the doctor and the merchant's spawn.

We must have a talk. So it seems you are not moving to St. Petersburg. I was counting on seeing you, as Misha assured me you

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

intended settling there. Keep well, then. The heavenly angels guard you. Your imagination is becoming an interesting thing.

Forgive the long letter.

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

TO ALEXEI SUVORIN

November 25, 1892, Melikhovo

You are not hard to understand and you abuse yourself needlessly for expressing yourself vaguely. You are a hard drinker and I treated you to sweet lemonade; after downing it wryly, you remark with entire justice that it hasn't an alcoholic kick. That is just what our works haven't got—the kick that would make us drunk and enthrall us, and this you set forth clearly. And why not? Leaving me and my *Ward No. 6* out of it, let's talk in general terms, which are more interesting. Let's talk of general causes, if it won't bore you, and let's embrace the whole age. Tell me in all conscience, which writers of my own generation, i.e., people from 30 to 45, have given the world even one drop of alcohol? Aren't Korolenko, Nadson, and all today's playwrights lemonade? Have Repin's or Shishkin's paintings really turned your head? All this is just amiable and talented, and though you are delighted, you still can't forget you'd like a smoke. Science and technical knowledge are now experiencing great days, for our brotherhood, though, the times are dull, stale and frivolous, we ourselves are stale and dreary. . . . The causes for it are not to be found in our stupidity or lack of gifts and not in our insolence, as Burenin holds, but in a disease which in an artist is worse than syphilis or sexual impotence. Our illness is a lack of "something," that is the rights of the case, and it means that when you lift the hem of our Muse's gown you will behold an empty void. Bear in mind that writers who are considered immortal or just plain good and who intoxicate us, have one very important trait in common: they are going somewhere and call you with them; you sense, not with your mind, but with all your being, that they have an aim, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, who had a reason for appearing and alarming the imagination. Looking at some of them in terms of their caliber you will see that they have immediate aims—the abolition of serfdom, the liberation of their country, political matters, beauty, or just vodka,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like Denis Davidov; others have remote aims—God, life beyond the grave, the happiness of mankind and so on. The best of them are realistic and paint life as it is, but because every line is saturated with juice, with the sense of life, you feel, in addition to life as it is, life as it should be, and you are entranced. Now what about us? Yes, us! We paint life such as it is—that's all, there isn't any more. . . . Beat us up, if you like, but that's as far as we'll go. We have neither immediate nor distant aims, and you can rattle around in our souls. We have no politics, we don't believe in revolution, we don't believe in God, we aren't afraid of ghosts, and personally I don't even fear death or blindness. He who doesn't desire anything, doesn't hope for anything and isn't afraid of anything cannot be an artist. It doesn't matter whether we call it a disease or not, the name doesn't matter, but we do have to admit that our situation is worse than a governor's. I don't know how it will be with us 10 or 20 years hence, perhaps circumstances may change by then, but for the time being it would be rash to expect anything really good from us, regardless of whether or not we are gifted. We write mechanically, in submission to the old established order whereby some people are in government service, others in business and still others write. . . . You and Grigorovich hold that I am intelligent. Yes, I am intelligent in that at least I don't conceal my illness from myself, don't lie to myself and don't cover my own emptiness with other people's intellectual rags, like the ideas of the '60s and so on. I won't throw myself down a flight of stairs, like Garshin, but neither will I attempt to flatter myself with hopes of a better future. I am not to blame for my disease, and it is not for me to cure myself, as I have to assume this illness has good aims which are obscure to us and not inflicted without good reason. . . . "It wasn't just the weather that brought them together. . . ."

Well sir, now as to the intellect. Grigorovich believes the mind can triumph over talent. Byron was as brilliant as a hundred devils, but it was his talent that made him immortal. If you tell me that X spoke nonsense because his intellect triumphed over his talent, or vice versa, I will reply that X had neither intellect nor talent. . . .

. . . The Heavens guard you!

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

To Alexei Suvorin

February 6, 1898, Nice

A few days ago I saw a striking announcement on the first page of *New Time* on the forthcoming issue of *Cosmopolis,* which will contain my story, "On A Visit." To begin with, my story isn't called "On A Visit" but "Visiting with Friends." In the second place, this sort of publicity goes against the grain; let alone the fact that the story itself is far from unusual, being one of those things you grind out one per day.

You write you are provoked with Zola, while here the general feeling is as though a new, better Zola had come into being. In this trial of his he has cleaned off all his external grease spots with turpentine, as it were, and now gleams before the French in his true brilliance. His is a purity and moral elevation which no one had suspected. Just trace the whole scandal from the beginning. The degradation of Dreyfus, whether just or otherwise, had a depressing, dismal effect on everyone (among others on you, too, as I recall). At the time of his sentencing Dreyfus conducted himself like an honorable, well-disciplined officer, while others present, the journalists, for instance, yelled at him, "Shut up, you Judas!" i.e., behaved themselves scandalously. Everybody came away dissatisfied and left the courtroom with a troubled conscience. Particularly dissatisfied was Dreyfus' defense attorney, Démange, an honest man, who even during the preliminary hearing had felt something was wrong behind the scenes; then there were the experts, who, to convince themselves that they were not mistaken, spoke only of Dreyfus, of his guilt, and kept roaming through Paris, roaming. . . . Of the experts, one turned out to be crazy, the author of a grotesque, absurd scheme, two were eccentrics. The logic of the situation was such that one was bound to question the intelligence bureau of the War Ministry, that military consistory devoted to spy-hunting and reading other people's letters; then people started saying that Sandher, the bureau chief, was afflicted with progressive paralysis; Paty de Clam turned out to be almost a counterpart of the Berliner, Tausch; and Picquart resigned, suddenly and mysteriously. A regular series of gross errors of justice came to light, as though purposely arranged. People became convinced, little by little, that Dreyfus had really been condemned on the basis of a secret document which had not been shown either to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the defendant or to his attorney—and law-abiding people looked upon this as a basic breach of justice; had that letter been written even by the sun itself, not to speak of Wilhelm, it still should have been shown to Démange. Everyone made wild guesses as to the contents of this letter and cock and bull stories were current. Dreyfus was an officer, and so the military expected the worst; Dreyfus was a Jew—the Jews expected the worst. . . . All the talk was of militarism, of the yids. . . . Such profoundly distrusted people as Drumont held their heads high; an evil plant began growing in the soil of anti-Semitism, in a soil stinking of the slaughterhouse. When something does not go well with us, we look for reasons outside of us and have no trouble finding them: "It's the French who are ruining us, the yids, Wilhelm. . . ." Capital, bogeymen, Masons, the syndicate, the Jesuits—these are all specters, but how they do assuage our uneasy minds! These things are a bad sign, of course. Once the French started talking about yids, or the syndicate, it was an indication that they felt all was not well, that some worm was gnawing underneath, that they needed such specters to appease their troubled consciences. Then this Esterhazy, a brawler out of Turgenev, an insolent, doubtful character, a man despised by his comrades, the striking similarity of his handwriting with that of the document, the letters of the Uhlan, the threats he chose not to carry out for reasons of his own, finally the strange decision, made in absolute secrecy, that the document was written in Esterhazy's handwriting but not by his hand. . . . The gases were accumulating, and people began feeling acute tension, an oppressive closeness in the air. The scuffle in the court was a pure manifestation of nerves, simply a hysterical consequence of this tension. Zola's letter and his trial are also aspects of this same situation. What would you want? It is for the best people, always ahead of their nations, to be the first to sound the alarm—and this is just what happened. First to speak up was Scherer-Koestner, whom the French, knowing him, call (in Kovalevski's[8] words) a "Caucasian dagger"—he is so shiningly clean and flawless. Zola was the second. And now he is on trial.

8 Kovalevski was a historian, sociologist and jurist. Because of his liberal views he lost his post as professor at Moscow University and emigrated to Paris, where he taught and lectured.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Yes, Zola is not Voltaire, nor are any of us Voltaires, but life sometimes sets up such a concurrence of circumstances that reproaching us for not being Voltaires becomes extremely out of place. Think of Korolenko, who defended the Multan pagans and saved them from penal servitude. Nor was Doctor Haas a Voltaire, yet his wonderful life ran along to a very happy ending.

I am acquainted with the affair from the stenographic report and it certainly is not what you read in the newspapers. I can see Zola plain. The important point is that he is sincere, i.e., he builds his judgments solely on what he sees, and not on specters, as others do. Sincere people can certainly make mistakes—no doubt about that—but such mistakes cause less harm than well-advised insincerity, prejudices or political considerations. Suppose Dreyfus is guilty: Zola is right anyway, because it is the writer's business not to accuse and not to persecute, but to champion the guilty, once they are condemned and suffer punishment. People will say, what about politics and the interests of the government? But great writers and artists should engage in politics only to the extent necessary to defend themselves against politics. Even without political considerations there are plenty of accusers, prosecutors and policemen, and in any case the role of Paul suits them better than that of Saul. And no matter what the verdict may be, Zola nonetheless will experience a vibrant joy after the trial is over, his old age will be a good old age and when he dies it will be with a serene, or at any rate eased, conscience.

The French people have sickened and they grasp at every word of comfort and at every well-intended reproach coming from without; that is why Björnstern's letter was so popular here, along with our Zakrevski's article (which people read in the *News*), and why the abuse of Zola was so obnoxious, i.e., the stuff the yellow press, which the French despise, dishes up for them every day. No matter how neurotic Zola may be, in court he still represents French common sense, and so the French love him and are proud of him, although they applaud the generals who, simple-minded as they are, frighten them first with the honor of the army and then with the threat of war.

See what a long letter this is. It is spring here and the mood is that of a Little Russian Easter: warmth, sunshine, the peal of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bells, memories of the past. Do come! By the way, Duse will be playing here. . . .

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

To MAXIM GORKI

December 3, 1898, Yalta

Dear Alexei Maximovich,

Your last letter afforded me great pleasure. Thank you with all my heart. *Uncle Vanya* was written long ago, a very long time ago; I have never seen it on the stage. During these past few years it has been presented often on provincial stages—perhaps because a collection of my plays has been published. On the whole I react coolly toward my plays, have long ago lost touch with the theater and don't feel like writing for it any more.

You ask for my opinion of your stories. My opinion? You have undoubted talent, truly a genuine, immense talent. In your story "On the Steppe," for example, your talent is shown as extraordinarily powerful, and I even experienced a moment of envy that it was not I who had written it. You are an artist and a brilliant man. You feel things magnificently; you are plastic, i.e., when you depict a thing, you see it and touch it with your hands. That is true art. There you have my opinion, and I am very glad that I can come out with it. I repeat, I am very glad, and if we could meet and chat for an hour or two, you would be convinced how highly I value you and what hope I have in your gifts.

Now shall I speak of your defects? This is not so easy, though. Referring to shortcomings in the way of talent is like talking of the defects of a fine tree in an orchard; in the main it is certainly not a question of the tree itself but of the tastes of those who look at it. Isn't that so?

I will begin by pointing out that in my opinion you have no restraint. You are like a spectator in a theater who expresses his rapture so unrestrainedly that he prevents himself and others from hearing. This lack of restraint is especially evident in your descriptions of nature, which break up the continuity of your dialogues; one would like these descriptions to be more compact and concise, just two or three lines or so. The frequent references to voluptuousness, whisper-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing, velvet softness and so on lend a certain rhetorical quality and monotony to these descriptions, and they dampen one's enthusiasm and almost fatigue the reader. This lack of restraint is also evident in your characterizations of women ("Malva," "On the Rafts") and in love scenes. The effect you create is not of expansiveness nor of a broad sweep of your brush, but merely lack of restraint. Then, you make frequent use of words entirely unsuited to your kind of story. Accompaniment, disk, harmony—these words stand in the way of the narrative. You speak often of waves. There is a strained, circumspect effect in your portrayals of people of culture; it is not because you haven't observed them closely enough, for you do know them; it is that you don't exactly know how to tackle them.

How old are you? I don't know you or where you come from or who you are, but it seems to me that you should quit Nizhni while you are still young and really live for two or three years, lose yourself, so to speak, among literature and literary people; it would not be in order to learn to crow like the rest of our cocks or to acquire even more sharpness, but rather to plunge head over heels into literature and fall in love with it; in addition, the provinces cause one to age early. Korolenko, Potapenko, Mamin and Ertel are all excellent people; at the outset, perhaps, their company may seem somewhat dull, but after a year or two you will get used to them and esteem them according to their merits; their society will pay you back with interest for the unpleasantness and inconvenience of life in the capital.

I am hurrying to the post office. Keep well and happy, and let me clasp your hand cordially. I thank you again for your letter.

Yours,

A. CHEKHOV

To MIKHAIL MENSHIKOV[9]

January 28, 1900, Yalta

Dear Mikhail Osipovich,

I cannot figure out what sort of ailment Tolstoy has. Cherinov[10] failed to reply and from what I read in the newspapers and what

9 Mikhail Menshikov (1859-1919) was a sailor who became a journalist and editor of *This Week*.

10 Professor of medicine in Moscow to whom Chekhov had telegraphed in regard to Tolstoy's illness.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

you now write me it is impossible to draw any conclusion. Stomach or intestinal ulcers would have been otherwise indicated; there is no ulcerous condition present, nothing but bleeding scratches caused by gallstones passing through and making lacerations. He doesn't have a cancer, either, which would be immediately reflected in lack of appetite, general condition and above all in his face. Most likely Tolstoy is in good health (apart from the stones) and will live another twenty years or so. His illness frightened me and kept me in a state of tension. I dread Tolstoy's death. His death would create a vacuum in my life. To begin with, I have never loved anyone as much as him; I am an unbeliever, but of all the faiths I consider his the nearest to my heart and most suited to me. Then again, as long as there is a Tolstoy in literature it is simple and gratifying to be a literary figure; even the awareness of not having accomplished anything and not expecting to accomplish anything in the future is not so terrible, because Tolstoy makes up for all of us. His career is justification for all the hopes and expectations reposed in literature. In the third place, Tolstoy stands solid as a rock with his immense authority, and as long as he remains alive bad taste in literature, all vulgarity, be it insolent or tearful, all coarse, irascible vanities will be held at a distance, deep in the shadows. His moral authority alone is capable of keeping so-called literary moods and trends at a certain high level. Without him the literary world would be a flock without a shepherd or a hopeless mess.

To wind up the subject of Tolstoy, I have something to say about *Resurrection,* which I did not read in fits and starts but all at one gulp. It is a remarkable work of art. The most uninteresting section is that concerned with the relations of Nekhludov and Katusha; the most interesting characters are the princes, generals, old ladies, peasants, prisoners and overseers. As I read the scene at the general's, the commandant of the Peter and Paul Prison, and a spiritualist, my heart beat furiously, it was so good! And Mme. Korchagina in her armchair, and the peasant, Feodosia's husband! This peasant calls his old lady a "crafty character." So it is with Tolstoy; he has a crafty pen. The novel has no end; what there is can hardly be called one. Certainly it is using a theological device when he writes on and on and then proceeds to resolve the problems raised on the basis of a Gospel text. It is as arbitrary to use such a solution as it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is to divide criminals into five classes. Why five and not ten? Why use a text from the Gospels and not from the Koran? First you ought to make people believe in the truth of the Gospels and then you can go ahead and solve your problem with a Gospel text. . . .

I am certainly going to send you my photograph. I am pleased to have acquired the title of academician, since it is nice knowing that Sigma envies me. But I shall be even gladder when I lose this title after some misunderstanding. And there will undoubtedly be misunderstandings, because the learned academicians are very much afraid that we shall shock them. Tolstoy was elected with a gnashing of the teeth. In their opinion he is a nihilist. At least that was how a lady, the wife of a very important person, entitled him, and I congratulate him upon it with all my heart. . . .

Yours,

Write! A. CHEKHOV

Mac Hammond

STILL LIFE WITH VILLEINS AND IRIS

Once upon a time, there, lived a man all his life.
The wood, the thatch, the stones are washed away,
But underneath the iris stubs and rock, a knife
Or bowl or pot or broken cup could say
What was his daily bread. From the fields

Rafe came home, smelling like a horse or hay,
To swill his soup and want his tired wife
And laid her down, yes, every night
And went to sleep with bad dreams of the Devil
Riding the Scarlet Whore up steep and down.

Iris grow there now, their purple roots
Touch the nearest damp and, digging, clutch
At dreams of long ago and curl around the midden
Where he ate; and maybe some old bone that walked
Within the underling, chalks the flower white.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Jacob Taubes

FROM CULT TO CULTURE

In chapter XXVIII of *Doctor Faustus* Thomas Mann introduces an interlude on the social life of Adrian Leverkühn that in the context of a radical critique of culture shows the hybris that will eventually overtake the composer. Adrian has just finished a short symphony called *Marvels of the Universe,* a mock-pathetic title stressing the latent Luciferean element in the piece. This musical sacrilege is strangely echoed in the salon society of Munich before the outbreak of the First World War by a theory of myth presaging the rise of a conservative nihilism.

It was in such a society that Thomas Mann himself first came in contact with the ideas of a revolutionary conservatism. This ideology, first infecting the intellectual avant-garde which carried it into other circles, had little to do with the traditional conservative prejudices and attitudes of an aristocratic society. There was no longer anything aristocratic in the spirit of an intelligentsia driven by a revolutionary impetus more disruptive than any liberalism and yet possessing, as though in mockery, a strong conservative appeal.

Since the turn of the century a decaying aristocracy living off the rapidly diminishing capital of its old traditions had been seeking to relate itself to the post-revolutionary conservatism of an intelligentsia revolting against the bourgeois-liberal ethos from the other end, from the standpoint of novelty rather than tradition. From this marriage sprang the demons of fascism and Nazism.

It is strange that the intellectual whom Thomas Mann presents as a model of the ideologues of conservative nihilism should be a scholar by the name of Dr. Chaim Breisacher. His intellectual knowingness and nose for the latest views serve in his case a conservative ideology. I doubt, however, that such general characteristics would have induced the author to bring Breisacher, with his fermenting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

spirit, into the aristocratic salons of Munich had not memory pointed to a Jewish scholar whose archaistic theory of myth was put to the uses of reaction.

Dr. Chaim Breisacher is described as a person of fascinating ugliness and as a polyhistor who could talk about anything and everything. His major concern is "philosophy of culture," but his ideas are decidedly "anti-cultural," in so far as he views the whole history of civilization as nothing but a process of decline from cult to culture. For culture is to him only a mocking caricature of archaic cults. He concentrates all his attacks on "progress"—a term of deepest contempt on his lips. Thus he declares it to be the peak of modern arrogance for people to shrug their shoulders at the flat painting of ancient times, as if the development toward perspective art were really a step forward instead of a mere means of producing illusion, a technique that suits the mob. It is true that the art of the ancients lacks the dimension of perspective, but that is not because they were incapable of producing such trick effects. The fact is that they would have considered them vulgar. And Breisacher employs the same argument in discussing the development of music. Here too he denounces the change from monody to harmony, generally taken as a sure sign of progress, to be an acquisition of barbarism.

His interest seems to be centered on the theory of decline as such. Polyphonic music becomes the object of his conservative protection as soon as he discusses the transition to the harmonic chordal principle and the instrumental music of the last two centuries. This stage was again the decline of the great art of counterpoint, which had had nothing to do with the prostitution of feeling, so common in modern music. In this general curve of decline he also places the music of Bach, who as the inventor of the well-tempered clavichord developed the possibility of understanding notes ambiguously and exchanging them enharmonically.

Breisacher's cultural harangue reaches its climax when the discussion shifts to the field of religion, touching thereupon his own sphere of origin, the Jewish people and its spiritual history. Prophets and psalmists represent for him an already decayed stage of religion in which every contact with the fundamental realities of ritual has been lost. The "theology" of the prophets or psalmists no longer had

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any idea of the genuine actuality of Jahve, the Elohim of Israel. In the magic rites, which at the time of cultic potency forced the Elohim of the people into physical presence, prophets and psalmists could only see "riddles of primeval times."

He is particularly cutting about King Solomon "the wise," whom he denounces as "an aesthete unnerved by erotic excesses and in a religious sense a progressivist blockhead" typical of the regression of the cult from an effectively present national god into the preaching of an abstract and generally human deity in heaven. He refers to Solomon's prayer in the temple, where the king asks: "But will God indeed dwell on the earth?" as a "scandalous speech." As though Israel's unique task had not consisted in building for its god a dwelling, a tent, and in providing all means for his constant presence. King Solomon's "sermon" was just twaddle and ushered in the poets of the Psalms who exiled the Elohim entirely into the blue sky, singing constantly of a deity in heaven whereas the Pentateuch does not even know the heavens as a seat of god. The Elohim of the Pentateuch (which Chaim Breisacher strangely enough takes to be a homogeneous archaic document) leads his people in a pillar of fire; the god of Israel dwells among the people. While later psalmists piously ask in the name of God: "Do I then eat the flesh of bulls and drink the blood of goats?" the Pentateuch expressly describes the sacrifices as the actual nourishment of Jahve. These pious litanies of the psalmists were actually a slap of impertinent enlightenment in the face of the reality of the cultic communion.

Breisacher's archaistic interpretation of the Pentateuch, which Thomas Mann describes at length and not without amusement, does not stop at details of the exegesis. He cannot say enough to show the genuine cultic communion with the Elohim of Israel as a magic technique, a manipulation of dynamic forces in which mishaps might easily occur, catastrophic short circuits due to mistakes and failures. Religion as ethics he considers a pale substitute for the sacral acts of the cult. Ethical codes of morality are a typical intellectual misunderstanding of laws rooted in archaic rituals. Prayer is for him only "the vulgarized and rationalistically watered-down late form" of very active and real magic invocation, the coercion of the gods.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

II

The negative critique of Chaim Breisacher's propositions that runs through the pages of chapter XXVIII does not, I believe, give a full account of the author's fascination with Oskar Goldberg, whose life and work were his model for the portrait of Dr. Chaim Breisacher. Not only does Mann's Joseph tetralogy draw heavily on the work of Goldberg, but his theoretical statements on mythology are also influenced by that strange historian and philosopher of religion, who after Johann Jacob Bachofen was the most radical interpreter of mythology. He took the language of myth so seriously that from a historian of mythology he evolved into a philosopher of mythology.

It is, I think, significant that Thomas Mann chose Goldberg's theory of mythology for his crucial chapter on myth and humanism. "One has to take away mythology from intellectual fascism and switch it over into humanism," Thomas Mann writes in 1941, thus giving a clue to his great critique of Oskar Goldberg in the portrait of Chaim Breisacher. This "switch-over" of mythology into humanism—the major theme of his exchange of letters with Karl Kerenyi, the Hungarian historian of religion—is preformed by psychology.

It is well known that Thomas Mann's novels on mythical themes are indebted to Freud's psychoanalysis. Yet psychology and sociology (and Freud's psychoanalysis is constructed on sociological rather than on biological premises) are, as Philip Rahv has noted, inherently anti-mythic. If the union of myth and humanism to which Thomas Mann aspires is to be realized in the coming age, neither a psychology nor a sociology of myth (which can give only an historical account) can satisfy his intention. Therefore Mann is driven time and again to the opposite pole, to the work of Oskar Goldberg, who neither psychologized nor sociologized myth but insisted on the reality of man's mythical experience: the gods.

Goldberg's philosophy of myth is the extreme opposite of the psychoanalytic theory of myth, whose purely formal interpretation is symptomatic of an unmythical age, which can in no way do justice to the constitution of myth in its pristine form. Goldberg's mythological philosophy presented Thomas Mann with the possibility of arresting the total dissolution of myth. Therefore his work remained

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for Mann fascinating and repulsive at the same time; fascinating, because Goldberg's philosophy could be set over against Freud's ideologization of myth; repulsive, because Mann became aware of its regressive nihilistic implications. Mann tried (with poetic license) to steer a course between these alternatives in his interpretation of mythology. Still, in 1937, when Thomas Mann together with Konrad Falke started to publish a journal *Mass und Wert* (dedicated to "free German culture") he invited Oskar Goldberg to contribute.

Goldberg's major work, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* (Berlin 1925), which presents itself as "an introduction to the system of the Pentateuch," puts the problem of the "mythical reality" into an entirely new perspective. Only one volume of this work was published, and it is doubtful if now after the author's death a second volume will ever appear. The book, though published in 1925, is derived from lectures given in private circles between 1903 and 1908. These dates are not without significance, for they provide us with a clue to the author's cultural "location." Bergson's philosophy, which influenced Sorel's political theory of myth, is also traceable in the conceptual apparatus of Goldberg's theory of mythology.

Yet Goldberg's philosophy of mythology should not be confused with the fabricated mythology so much in vogue in political groups and literary circles since Nietzsche and Sorel. Goldberg understood that Socrates represented a caesura dividing the history of mankind into an *ante* and *post* which cannot be eradicated at will. In fact, for him Socrates was much more to the point than Nietzsche, since the Greek rationalist understood that a society cannot artificially prolong the life of a myth. When, according to Goldberg, does mythology degenerate into a mere literary product? When the pantheon of gods no longer stands behind the myth. Nietzsche, in protesting against Socrates and attempting to return to the ecstasy of tragic greatness, necessarily paved the way for Sorel's literary and political apotheosis of mythology and for the ominous "myth of the twentieth century" culminating in a manipulated mass-hysteria of nations and classes.

The way to a new mythical age must follow the road of Socrates, the road of philosophy. The coming mythical age will be discovered by reason. Goldberg's philosophy of myth presents a classical case for the dialectic of reason that destroys itself "reasonably" and calls for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the magical ritual of the mythical age to counteract the tyrannical rule of technology in our civilization. Yet no modern philosopher has been so deeply influenced by the spirit of technology as Oskar Goldberg. For his interpretation of myth and ritual is given in a totally unsentimental and unliterary language, that could be taken from a textbook on electro-magnetism. Against his will he testifies to the morphological congruity between magical ritualism and technical "know-how." Unintentionally he explains to us a dark side of our age: the nexus between the magical ritualism and the spiritual conformity of the masses in a technological society.

It speaks for the deep insight of Thomas Mann that he describes the process of reason's self-annihilation by analyzing Goldberg's philosophy of myth. It is, I think, of secondary importance that by 1947 he found Goldberg's highly conservative exegesis amusing and repulsive. It remains that he saved Goldberg's work from total oblivion by incorporating long passages from *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer* into chapter XXVIII of *Doctor Faustus*. Out of context some of the passages might strike the reader as comical, but in the context Goldberg's interpretation of the Pentateuch presents a serious challenge to the accepted theological interpretation of it, be it orthodox, conservative or liberal. But as usual theology met the challenge—with silence.

III

There are basically only two possible interpretations of myth: either you explain the language of myth as a specific symbolic form, or you take the record of mythology as reality. If the realm of myth is to be taken seriously then, Goldberg argues, it is not enough to refer to "psychic realities," for such a solution evades the fundamental choice between phantasy and reality. If myths tell us about real events then they testify to patterns that are contrary to the law of nature in which we live. The universe is ruled by a uniform system of natural laws that are valid everywhere and at every time. Only if this uniform system of natural laws is broken can a mythical event occur.

The problem of the reality of the mythical event rests on an ontological premise stressing the tension between spirit and matter. Only under the most difficult conditions can spirit be made to unite

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with matter. The spirit is not "at home" in the realm of matter. Against all vitalistic theories Goldberg insists on the sovereignty of life in the natural universe. The principle of life connects spirit and the realm of matter. Therefore the element of life is dominant in the texture of nature. Biology is, rightly understood, a trans-empirical science. Biology is metaphysics. Even if life manifests itself in the empirical realm, the laws of biology have their origin beyond the physical realm. These origins, constituting the "well springs" of life, are the gods of the mythical age.

The gods are the "biological centers" of the various races of mankind. Goldberg is the first after Hegel and Schelling to try a philosophic interpretation of polytheism: the god of one people is distinguished from the god of another people by the difference in biological centers. Every people which is a genuine kin-community has one (or several interconnected) biological centers. The idea of a god is for Goldberg not related to the abstract idea of "humanity" but essentially connected with the idea of a people. The god has for the unity of the people a "biological" meaning. Mythology is therefore not a collection of ethnological phantasmagoria but teaches us something about the actual relation of a people to its "biological" center.

The relation between the god and the people is a covenant. It is therefore not unilateral. Also, the people have an important biological role for the gods. The members of the clan are a potential field for the divine power and the people as an entity serve as an instrument through which the divine power manifests itself.

The primordial equation (peoples=gods) pertinent for the interpretation of myth limits the power of the gods to ancient times. For only antiquity has known peoples that are concretely related to their biological center. The amalgamation of races, the dissolving of nations in the modern period, reflects the growing fixation of human society upon the system of natural laws, culminating in a technology that destroys the last remnants of communities potent in rite and myth. In such a situation only philosophy can break the universal domination of natural laws.

In the covenant between the people and their god a specific boundary is constituted, the historical territory in which the god and the people meet. The god is also the power of the land. The

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

land as an historical unit is related to specific divine powers. The earth of the land is not simply a natural space but a dynamic divinized reality. Every "metaphysical people" presents a specific reality. Therefore the mythologies vary from people to people and from place to place. The various myths relate a particular story; however the people telling the story do not know that it is a particular tale they tell but consider it to be universally true. Its gods are presented as "the" gods, its heaven and its earth are turned by the people into "the" heaven and "the" earth. The mythical community cannot see beyond itself, generalizing its experience and creating a generalized "ideology." It bridges the hiatus between its concrete circumscribed horizon of life and the rest of mankind by generalizing its myth. It is therefore the task of the historian to translate the language of myth back into its original context. The mythical cosmogonies that tell the story of the creation of heaven and earth actually refer to the heaven and the earth of a specific people.

Goldberg's equation (peoples-gods-lands) is exemplified in his interpretation of the cult. A people needs a territory not only to dwell in but to actualize its cult. Not every territory is equally suitable for the cultic act. Peoples will migrate in search of a suitable territory where the well springs of its life, the gods, may break through. The land where the god and the people come together and find each other is a cultic territory. The cult presents the union of the biological powers of the people with its source of life. The aim of the cult is the covenant with the gods.

When a people first comes into a territory its earth is dark and void and its heavens above are closed until the cult is established. The territory is the foundation of the cult, but before the cult is established the territory remains neutral ground. Only when the cult comes into function does the earth come alive and the heavens spread above as the firmament. Hesiod in the first part of his theogony does not, as he thought, present a general cosmogony but rather records the constitution of the cult. The various cosmogonies of mythology do not tell the story of the creation of heaven and earth but rather give a very detailed account of the constitution of cult. Gods and mortals must work together in taming the wild and overwhelming powers in both the divine and human realms. Therefore the first sacred act on the part of the gods is a sacrifice of gods as much as on the part of man it is the sacrifice of men. Once the common bond between gods

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and men is established the covenant of the cult comes into being. The covenant is an entirely unmetaphorical symbol. The "symbol" is the contract, the union between two partners. The symbol is a sign of the covenant, by which the gods manifest themselves in the community of men.

The reciprocal covenant between gods and peoples aims to rule the forces of matter. The people wants to emancipate itself from the chains of necessity of the laws of nature. The gods, on the other hand, need a mechanism to break through the wall of nature's "iron law." Gods and peoples are united against a common enemy: the natural nexus of the universe. The natural *rocher de bronze* cannot be overcome without specific action and effort. What contradicts the laws of nature is the "miracle" which Goldberg takes as a concrete "biological-metaphysical" phenomenon and not simply as a figure of speech. The miracle is a "political action" of transcendent powers manifesting themselves in the community of men. The powers manifested are the gods.

In the cultic communion the union between the pantheon of the gods and the community of men is perpetuated. As long as "the way up and down is one and the same" the mythical era is real. It rests on the idea of reciprocity between the gods and the mortals. Men ascend to heaven and gods come down to earth. Such an era has no idea of destiny, because the relation between gods and men is still personal. As soon as the idea of destiny rises the twilight of the gods is near. Man is cut off from the cultic communion with the gods and left to himself. The idea of destiny comes to the fore when a mythical age is drawing to its end and the reciprocity of the cultic covenant interrupted. From the experience of destiny the way is open for the idea of causality ruling in the realm of man as in the realm of nature. Greek tragedy presents this very drama of the gradual eclipse of the gods.

The way from cult to culture leads through the period of fixation in which the relation between a people and its god becomes paralyzed. The "powers" interested in perpetuating and stabilizing the universal rule of natural law tend to outlaw all "miracles," all possible breakthroughs into the realm of nature, cutting off the communion between the people and its biological center, the gods. This process of fixation leads in the end to the dissolution of the people as a biological unit.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It is technique which is substituted for man's cultic communion with the gods. The physical tool can, according to Goldberg, fulfill to a certain degree the function of the ritualistic sacral act, since technique deals on the "unorganic" level with the same problem that the cult deals with in the "organic" realm. Technique and ritual have been in opposition since time immemorial. If a man builds an altar he shall not build it of hewn stone, for, according to the Pentateuch, lifting the technical tool upon the altar he would desecrate the cultic table.

The forces opposing the cultic union through the process of fixation are symbolized in the image of the Leviathan. This symbol has survived as a mythical relic into modern times, and found a striking revival in the essay of Hobbes on "the matter, form and power of a commonwealth, ecclesiastical and civic." For it is precisely through the dissolution of the kin-communities that the artificially organized society, the mortal god of the state, is erected. The state functions as a substitute for and heir to the cultic covenant, institutionalizing the impersonal social contract.

The shift from the cultic community to the society of the state is reflected also in the transition from the concrete national religions to the abstract world religions. The god of the people who broke through the barrier of the laws of nature turns into the Creator of the natural order. Whereas the national religions rest on the concrete relation of a people to its biological center, the god of the world religions (when "genuine" peoples no longer exist) represents not a reality but an abstract notion. The god of a concrete people cannot do everything, but what he can do he does with power. The god of the world religions, however, is one who can do everything, possesses all power—and therefore is concretely only an empty formula, an ideological façade that can be filled with any content. In the world religions the relation between god and man is merely fictitious. In the process of fixation the actively present god is turned into an abstract "good lord" who becomes everything and presently —nothing.

The stages of the metamorphosis of god from the active, present god of the people to the general god of mankind can be studied in the literature of the Old Testament. The development from the ritual of the Pentateuch to the *ethos* of prophetism, which in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perspective of progress is usually considered as the step from a primitive ritualism to a "pure" monotheism, is evaluated by Oskar Goldberg according to the specific weight of religious substance inherent in the ritual of the cult and which is lacking in the "pure" monotheism of the prophets or in late philosophy. Jahve, the Elohim of Israel, goes before his people by day as a cloud and by night as a pillar of fire. He walks among the people and has his dwelling among them. Jahve, the Elohim of Israel, lives in active presence among his people, whereas King Solomon, the builder of the centralized sanctuary and the enlightened philosopher-king, sermonizes on abstract principles. The late psalmists can see in the gods of the peoples only idols, the work of man's hand. Thus the way is opened for the development of the abstract theological monotheism of Judaism and Christianity.

In the Babylonian exile the people of Israel indeed encountered gods that were mere idols, bereft of all numinal powers, because Babylon, like later Rome and today the West, was the incarnation of "culture." The story of the tower of Babel symbolically concentrates within this society all the powers that have been taken away from the biological divine forces and that now join in the building of a technical civilization. This civilizaton is the activity of the progeny of Cain, the first technician and founder of cities.

Only when the biological communities collapse can the organization of the state flourish. The society of the state aims by technical means to halt the progressive disintegration of the biological community. The Babylonian and Roman deities are gods of the state and not the biological center of peoples. They are civic representatives and their pantheon belongs to the category of civic theology. Babylon is (for the Pentateuch and the prophet Isaiah) a "no people" and its gods "no gods." Only such state gods are treated in the Pentateuch as nonentities, whereas the gods of Egypt appear as potent antagonists of Israel's god. The exodus of the people of Israel out of Egypt is for the Pentateuch primarily a war waged between Jahve, the Elohim of Israel, and the Elohim of Egypt.

Goldberg's "archaic exegesis" has, I think, led to some striking results by bringing the primordial strata of myth and ritual of the Pentateuch into relief. The cultic communion presupposes the actuality of Jahve and the negative but active reality of the "other gods."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But he defeats his purpose in trying to press the Pentateuch into a "system," thereby necessarily overlooking the manifold strata that run through the compilation of the various books. At this point the historian of ritual himself falls victim to ritualism. The subject of inquiry boomeranged on the method of inquiry.

Goldberg's major impetus was however not philological "archeology" but the fundamental problem of a theodicy. His inquiry led him to the somewhat startling discovery that even the Pentateuch had nothing to do with the general "theological concepts" of divine omnipotence and divine omnipresence. If Jahve, the Elohim of Israel, is waging war on other Elohim, such a statement is only meaningful if the superiority of one of the parties is, at least for a while, in doubt. Neither can the concept of divine omnipresence be upheld in the view of divine revelations. God is not everywhere but only where he "manifests" himself. The presence of god is limited to the place where his name is known. If god is bound to his manifestation, then he is also limited to a corporeality from which he can be freed, outside the Pentateuch, only by a theological *tour de force.*

Only if the concepts of divine omnipotence and omnipresence are set aside, can the question of divine justice be asked in a meaningful way. Goldberg's answer implies that the just god is at this time not present, and that his reality and power are eclipsed. Therefore the question of divine justice does not arise at all. Justice is possible in an ultimate sense only when the war waged between the gods comes to an end and the premundane god becomes manifest in the world. Only at the end of history do the *Milchamoth Jahve,* the wars of Jahve, end. Only in eschatological terms can the prophet Isaiah speak about the *jeschuat Jahve,* the victory of Jahve, in the war with the "other gods," when the primordial "one god" will manifest himself as the Elohim of Israel. Since the primordial god is not present in the world, it is the task of the peoples to bring the primordial god into power, thus enacting his liberation from the bondage of being a mere potentiality.

This eschatological theogony reminds the historian of religion strongly of the ideology of Jewish gnostics in the late eighteenth century, when the radical wing of Sabbatian messianists developed a strikingly similar theology distinguishing the premundane "one god" from the "many gods" in history. Together with the gnostics, Oskar

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Goldberg rejects in his philosophy of religion the sterile orthodox division between monotheism and polytheism and puts the emphasis on a dialectic between the present and absent god.

The absence of god is a general theme of gnostic philosophy and literature of the last twenty years. For Goldberg the eclipse of god takes the form of the absence of divine justice in the human realm. The sacral act of the people is a transcendental political action. Whereas other gnostics apotheosize and universalize the experience of absence, Goldberg tries to coerce god into presence by the magical potency of a sacral act. The sacral act effects as a political action the eschatological revolution.

At a time when the boundaries between cultic mythology and poetic phantasies have been so utterly confused that sheer enthusiasm for mythology can avail itself of the last remnants of prestige vested in religion without committing itself to any definite or rigorous standard of belief or action, and when poetic license manipulates mythic motives frivolously while putting on a mask of seriousness, Goldberg's radical philosophy of mythology has the advantage of facing squarely the problem of mythical reality and consciousness. It teaches us that mythology presupposes the actuality of a mythico-religious form of life. The premise is obscured in all theological or literary interpretations of mythology that can see in it only a symbolic mode of expression. Goldberg's theory of myth is a test case for all myth-enthusiasts who blur the simple but basic distinction between the real and the poetic.

In such a radical theory the partly grotesque and partly nihilistic consequences of a restitution of mythology come into the open —consequences which less responsible and more oracular (and therefore also more successful) hierophants like Martin Heidegger in philosophy or Ezra Pound in poetry fail to come to terms with. In order to establish the union between gods and men or to recover the potency of the sacral act man must first abandon or destroy the entire history of culture. I see Goldberg's originality not so much in his interpretation of myth, later confirmed in rough outline by empirical anthropology and ethnology, as in the terrifying literalness with which he set out to translate myth into reality and in his uncompromising will to take the records of archaic cults and rituals

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

seriously and not merely as a way of flirting with current fashions.

The archaism explicit in Goldberg's philosophy of myth, and latent in the so nebulous conservative nostalgia for it, weakens the foundations of culture and threatens to usher in that *tabula rasa* of civilization for which conservatives today like to blame the "tyranny of progress." Mythology after Socrates remains illusory. Goldberg's philosophy can only assert that we would have to eat again from the tree of knowledge in order to fall back into the state of innocence. Such is the law of the irreversible process of the history of consciousness.

Barbara Guest

AFTER THE CENTURY

Recognizing the marvelous conditions
Which prepare us for the interior,
Why should I be surprised
At a little of Vuillard in my house?

That presently my friends
Will see I have grown older
Is merely the device of men
To disturb the photograph after the wedding.

In silence then, reconsider your heretic's
Dislike of impassioned discovery,
Threatened by the automatic whim,
The viceroy's choice when beholding India

He claimed an empire before the fair
Himalayan night had been cleared
Into a bestiary for explorers, who might
Someday find they had not lost themselves, at all.

That the receipt was there, and the peak
Had already succumbed, like any luncheon,
Like any room in which a woman sits waiting,
Like any picture Vuillard ever painted.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Helen Forman

POSTURES, GESTURES

Postures and gestures determine the whole world:
Right as a hero, love, you must stand fair.
Quick fingers crook in hooks, in leaves half-furled,
The fretted feathers put their tongues uncurled,
A radiator stacks its knees in prayer.

I tell you softly the unbuttoned rose
Reflexes pinkly petals sure as toes.
See that bawd bumbler pedaling on its nose.
Steam slobbers agony in wistful throes
And dapper soldiers rocket from a hose.
Those thorns fixing a sanctity to Christ
Were fingers honed and thrilled. They realized
Caricature for His blood poured like rain
Muddling their pose, gutting their shame.

Perk tender towards an egg cooked to your fashion:
Tumble your wanton on its china bed
With fork contrite but tuned to ring some passion,
So teeth mash gallantly, squared stallions crashing.
Eyes starch to fried eggs on a head gone dead.

I tell you stoutly piggy in the pen
Huffs grumpy as a dragon in his den.
Take care, love, if in love you rove the glen:
Have deference for serious small men,
Brood with the rustic bench, a sitting hen.
Love, spend the silk purse crisped between your thighs
With real commitment, wholly as Christ
Emptied His body on His cross of thorns.
Love, let the sow's ear hang forlorn.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PARIS LETTER

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

The American student colony in Paris is a social phenomenon so amorphous as to at once demand and defy the generality. One's far from being in the position of finding not enough to say—one finds far too much, and everything one finds is contradictory. What one wants to know, at bottom, is what *they* came to find: to which question there are—at least—as many answers as there are faces at the café tables.

The assumed common denominator, which is their military experience, does not shed on this question as much light as one might hope. For one thing, it becomes impossible, the moment one thinks about it, to predicate the existence of a *common* experience. The moment one thinks about it, it becomes apparent that there is no such thing. That experience is a private, and a very largely speechless affair is the principal truth, perhaps, to which the colony under discussion bears witness—though the aggressively unreadable face which they, collectively, present also suggests the more disturbing possibility that experience may perfectly well be meaningless. This loaded speculation aside, it is certainly true that whatever this experience has done to them, or for them, whatever the effect has been, is, or will be, is a question to which no one has yet given any strikingly coherent answer. Military experience does not, furthermore, necessarily mean experience of battle, so that the student colony's common denominator reduces itself to nothing more than the fact that all of its members have spent some time in uniform. This is the common denominator of their entire generation, of which the majority is not to be found in Paris, or, for that matter, in Europe. One is at the outset, therefore, forbidden to assume that the fact of having surrendered to the necessary anonymity of uniform, or of having undergone the shock of battle, was enough to occasion this flight from home. The best that one can do by way of uniting these so disparate identities is simply to accept, without comment, the fact of their military experience, without questioning its extent; and, further, to suggest that they form, by virtue of their presence here, a somewhat unexpected minority. Unlike the majority of their fellows, who were simply glad to get back home, these have elected to tarry in the Old

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

World, among scenes and people unimaginably removed from anything they have known. They are willing, apparently, at least for a season, to endure the wretched Parisian plumbing, the public baths, the Paris age, and dirt—to pursue some end, mysterious and largely inarticulate, arbitrarily summed up in the verb, to study.

Arbitrarily, because, however hard the ex-GI is studying, it is very difficult to believe that it was only for this reason that he traveled so far. He is not, usually, studying anything which he couldn't study at home, in far greater comfort. (We are limiting ourselves, for the moment, to those people who are—more or less seriously—studying, as opposed to those, to be considered later, who are merely gold-bricking.) The people, for example, who are studying painting, which seems, until one looks around, the best possible subject to be studying here, are not studying, after all, with Picasso, or Matisse—they are studying with professors of the same caliber as those they would have found in the States. They are treated by these professors with the same high-handedness, and they accept their dicta with the very same measure of American salt. Nor can it be said that they produce canvases of any greater interest than those to be found along Washington Square, or in the cold-water flats of New York's lower east side. There is, *au contraire,* more than a little truth to the contention that the east side has a certain edge over Montparnasse, and this in spite of the justly renowned Paris light. If we tentatively use—purely by virtue of his numbers—the student painter as the nearest possible approach to a 'typical' student, we find that his motives for coming to Paris are anything but clear. One is forced to suppose that it was nothing more than the legend of Paris, not infrequently at its most vulgar and superficial level. It was certainly no love for French tradition, whatever, indeed, in his mind, that tradition may be; and, in any case, since he is himself without a tradition, he is ill equipped to deal with the traditions of any other people. It was no love for their language, which he doesn't, beyond the most inescapable necessities, speak; nor was it any love for their history, his grasp of French history being yet more feeble than his understanding of his own. It was no love for the monuments, cathedrals, palaces, shrines, for which, again, nothing in his experience prepares him, and to which, when he is not totally indifferent, he brings only the hurried bewilderment of the tourist. It was not even any particular admiration, or sympathy for the French, or, at least, none strong enough to bear the strain of actual contact. He may, at home, have admired their movies, in which case, confronting the reality, he tends to feel a little taken in. Those images created by Marcel Carné, for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

example, prove themselves treacherous precisely because they are so exact. The sordid French hotel room, so admirably detailed by the camera, speaking, in its quaintness, and distance, so beautifully of romance, undergoes a sea-change, becomes a room positively hostile to romance, once it is oneself, and not Jean Gabin, who lives there. This is the difference, simply, between what one desires and what the reality insists on—which difference we will not pursue except to observe that, since the reasons which brought the student here are so romantic, and incoherent, he has come, in effect, to a city which exists only in his mind. He cushions himself, so it would seem, against the shock of reality, by refusing for a very long time to recognize Paris at all, but clinging instead to its image. This is the reason, perhaps, that Paris for so long fails to make any mark on him; and may also be why, when the tension between the real and the imagined can no longer be supported, so many people undergo a species of breakdown, or take the first boat home.

For Paris is, according to its legend, the city where everyone loses his head, and his morals, lives through at least one *histoire d'amour,* ceases, quite, to arrive anywhere on time, and thumbs his nose at the Puritans—the city, in brief, where all become drunken on the fine, old air of freedom. This legend, in the fashion of legends, has this much to support it, that it is not at all difficult to see how it got started. It is limited, as legends are limited, by being—literally—unlivable, and by referring to the past. It is perhaps not amazing, therefore, that this legend appears to have virtually nothing to do with the life of Paris itself, with the lives, that is, of the natives, to whom the city, no less than the legend, belong. The charm of this legend proves itself capable of withstanding the most improbable excesses of the French bureaucracy, the weirdest vagaries of the *concierge,* the fantastic rents paid for uncomfortable apartments, the discomfort itself, and, even, the great confusion and despair which is reflected in French politics—and in French faces. More, the legend operates to place all of the inconveniences endured by the foreigner, to say nothing of the downright misery which is the lot of many of the natives, in the gentle glow of the picturesque, and the absurd; so that, finally, it is perfectly possible—for a greater, or longer time—to be enamored of Paris while remaining totally indifferent, or even hostile to the French. And this is made possible by the one person in Paris whom the legend seems least to affect, who is not living it at all, that is, the Parisian himself. He, with his impenetrable *politesse,* and with techniques unspeakably more direct, keeps the traveler at an unmistakable arm's length. Unlucky indeed, as well as rare, the traveler who thirsts to know the lives of the people—

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the people don't want him in their lives. Neither does the Parisian exhibit the faintest personal interest, or curiosity, concerning the life, or habits, of any stranger. So long as he keeps within the law, which, after all, most people have sufficient ingenuity to do, he may stand on his head, for all the Parisian cares. It is this arrogant indifference on the part of the Parisian, with its unpredictable effects on the traveler, which makes so splendid the Paris air, to say nothing whatever of the exhilarating effect it has on the Paris scene.

The American student lives here, then, in a kind of social limbo. He is allowed, and he gratefully embraces irresponsibility; and, at the same time, since he is an American, he is invested with power, whether or not he likes it, however he may choose to confirm or deny it. Though the students of any nation, in Paris, are allowed irresponsibility, few seem to need it as desperately as Americans seem to need it; and none, naturally, move in the same aura of power, which sets up in the general breast a perceptible anxiety, and wonder, and a perceptible resentment. This is the 'catch,' for the American, in the Paris freedom: that he becomes here a kind of revenant to Europe, the future of which continent, it may be, is in his hands. The problems proceeding from the distinction he thus finds thrust upon him might not, for a sensibility less definitively lonely, frame so painful a dilemma: but the American wishes to be liked *as a person,* an implied distinction which makes perfect sense to him, and none whatever to the European. What the American means is that he does not want to be confused with the Marshall Plan, Hollywood, the Yankee dollar, television, or Senator McCarthy. What the European, in a thoroughly exasperating innocence, assumes is that the American cannot, of course, be divorced from the so diverse phenomena which make up his country, and that he is willing, and able, to clarify the American conundrum. If the American cannot do this, his despairing aspect seems to say, who, under heaven, can? This moment, which instinctive ingenuity delays as long as possible, nevertheless arrives, and punctuates the Paris honeymoon. It is the moment, so to speak, when one leaves the Paris of legend and finds oneself in the real, and difficult Paris of the present. At this moment Paris ceases to be a city dedicated to *la vie bohème,* and becomes one of the cities of Europe. At this point, too, it may be suggested, the legend of Paris has done its deadly work, which is, perhaps, so to stun the traveler with freedom that he begins to long for the prison of home—home then becoming the place where questions are not asked.

It is at this point, precisely, that many and many a student packs his bags for home. The transformation which can be effected, in less than a year, in the attitude and aspirations of the youth who has di-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vorced himself from the crudities of main street in order to be married with European finesse is, to say the very least, astounding. His brief period of enchantment having ended, he cannot wait, it seems, to look again on his native land—the virtues of which, if not less crude, have also become, abruptly, *simple,* and *vital.* With the air of a man who has but barely escaped tumbling headlong into the bottomless pit, he tells you that he can scarcely wait to leave this city, which has been revealed to the eye of his maturity as old, dirty, crumbling, and dead. The people who were, when he arrived at Le Havre, the heirs of the world's richest culture, the possessors of the world's largest *esprit,* are really decadent, penurious, self-seeking, and false, with no trace of American spontaneity, and lacking in the least gratitude for American favors. Only America is alive, only Americans are doing anything worth mentioning in the arts, or in any other field of human activity: to America, only, the future belongs. Whereas, but only yesterday, to confess a fondness for anything American was to be suspected of the most indefensible jingoism, to suggest today that Europe is not all black is to place oneself under the suspicion of harboring treasonable longings. The violence of his embrace of things American is embarrassing, not only because one is not quite prepared to follow his admirable example, but also because it is impossible not to suspect that his present acceptance of his country is no less romantic, and unreal, than his earlier rejection. It is as easy, after all, and as meaningless, to embrace uncritically the cultural sterility of main street as it is to decry it. Both extremes avoid the question of whether or not main street is really sterile, avoid, in fact—which is the principal convenience of extremes—any questions about main street at all. What one vainly listens for in this cacophony of affirmation is any echo, however faint, of individual maturity. It is really quite impossible to be affirmative about anything which one refuses to question; one is doomed to remain inarticulate about anything which one hasn't, by an act of the imagination, made one's own. This so suddenly affirmative student is but changing the fashion of his innocence, nothing being more improbable than that he is now prepared, as he insists, to embrace his Responsibilities—the very word, in the face of his monumental aversion to experience, seems to shrink to the dimensions of a new, and rather sinister, frivolity.

The student, homeward bound, has only chosen, however, to flee down the widest road. Of those who remain here, the majority have taken roads more devious, and incomparably better hidden—so well hidden that they themselves are lost.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

One very often finds in this category that student whose adaptation to French life seems to have been most perfect, and whose studies—of French art, or the drama, the language, or the history—give him the greatest right to be here. This student has put aside chewing gum forever, he eschews the T-shirt, and the crew cut, he can only with difficulty be prevailed upon to see an American movie, and it is so patent that he is *actually* studying that his appearance at the café tables is never taken as evidence of frivolity, but only as proof of his admirable passion to study the customs of the country. One assumes that he is living as the French live—which assumption, however, is immediately challenged by the suspicion that no American *can* live as the French live, even if one could find an American who wanted to. This student lives, nevertheless, with a French family, with whom he speaks French, and takes his meals; and he knows, as some students do not, that the Place de la Bastille no longer holds the prison. He has read, or is reading, all of Racine, Proust, Gide, Sartre, and authors more obscure—in the original, naturally. He regularly visits the museums, and he considers Arletty to be the most beautiful woman and the finest actress in the world. But the world, it seems, has become the French world: he is unwilling to recognize any other. This so severely cramps the American conversational style, that one looks on this student with awe, and some shame—he is so spectacularly getting out of his European experience everything it has to give. *He* has certainly made contact with the French, and isn't wasting his time in Paris talking to people he might perfectly well have met in America. His friends are French, in the classroom, in the bistro, on the boulevard, and, of course, at home—it is only that one is sometimes driven to wonder what on earth they find to talk about. This wonder is considerably increased when, in the rare conversations he condescends to have in English, one discovers that, certain picturesque details aside, he seems to know no more about life in Paris than everybody knew at home. His friends have, it appears, leaped unscathed from the nineteenth into the twentieth century, entirely undismayed by any of the reverses suffered by their country. This makes them a remarkable band indeed, but it is in vain that one attempts to discover anything more about them—their conversation being limited, one gathers, to remarks about French wine, witticisms concerning *l'amour,* French history, and the glories of Paris. The remarkably limited range of their minds is matched only by their perplexing definition of friendship, a definition which does not seem to include any suggestion of communication, still less of intimacy. Since, in short, the relationship of this perfectly adapted student to the people he now so strenuously adores is based simply on his unwillingness to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

allow them any of the human attributes with which his countrymen so confounded him at home, and since his vaunted grasp of their history reveals itself as the merest academic platitude, involving his imagination not at all, the extent of his immersion in French life impresses one finally as the height of artificiality, and, even, of presumption. The most curious thing about the passion with which he has embraced the Continent is that it seems to be nothing more or less than a means of safeguarding his American simplicity. He has placed himself in a kind of strongbox of custom, and refuses to see anything in Paris which can't be seen through a golden haze. He is thus protected against reality, or experience, or change, and has succeeded in placing beyond the reach of corruption values he prefers not to examine. Even his multitudinous French friends help him to do this, for it is impossible, after all, to be friends with a mob: they are simply a cloud of faces, bearing witness to romance.

Between these two extremes, the student who embraces Home, and the student who embraces The Continent—both embraces, as we have tried to indicate, being singularly devoid of contact, to say nothing of love—there are far more gradations than can be suggested here. The American in Europe is everywhere confronted with the question of his identity, and this may be taken as the key to all the contradictions one encounters when attempting to discuss him. Certainly, for the student colony one finds no other common denominator—this is all, really, that they have in common, and they are distinguished from each other by the ways in which they come to terms, or fail to come to terms with their confusion. This prodigious question, at home so little recognized, seems, germ-like, to be vivified in the European air, and to grow disproportionately, displacing previous assurances, and producing tensions and bewilderments entirely unlooked for. It is not, moreover, a question which limits itself to those who are, so to speak, in traffic with ideas. It confronts everyone, finding everyone unprepared; it is a question with implications not easily escaped, and the attempt to escape can precipitate disaster. Our perfectly adapted student, for example, should his strongbox of custom break, may find himself hurled into that coterie of gold-bricks who form such a spectacular element of the Paris scene that they are often what the Parisian has in the foreground of his mind when he wonderingly mutters, *C'est vraiment les Américains.* The great majority of this group, having attempted, on more or less personal levels, to lose, or disguise their antecedents, are reduced to a kind of rubble of compulsion. Having cast off all previous disciplines, they have also lost the shape which these disciplines made

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for them and have not succeeded in finding any other. Their rejection of the limitations of American society has not set them free to function in any other society, and their illusions, therefore, remain intact: they have yet to be corrupted by the notion that society is never anything less than a perfect labyrinth of limitations. They are charmed by the reflection that Paris is more than two thousand years old, but it escapes them that the Parisian has been in the making just about that long, and that one does not, therefore, become Parisian by virtue of a Paris address. This little band of bohemians, as grimly singleminded as any evangelical sect, illustrate, by the very ferocity with which they disavow American attitudes, one of the most American of attributes, the inability to believe that time is real. It is this inability which makes them so romantic about the nature of society, and it is this inability which has led them into a total confusion about the nature of experience. Society, it would seem, is a flimsy structure, beneath contempt, designed by and for all the other people, and experience is nothing more than sensation—so many sensations, added up like arithmetic, give one the rich, full life. They thus lose what it was they so bravely set out to find, their own personalities, which, having been deprived of all nourishment, soon cease, in effect, to exist; and they arrive, finally, at a dangerous disrespect for the personalities of others. Though they persist in believing that their present shapelessness is freedom, it is observable that this present freedom is unable to endure either silence, or privacy, and demands, for its ultimate expression, a rootless wandering among the cafés. Saint Germain des Près, the heart of the American colony, so far from having absorbed the American student, has been itself transformed, on spring, summer, and fall nights, into a replica, very nearly, of Times Square.

But if this were all one found in the American student colony, one would hardly have the heart to discuss it. If the American found in Europe only confusion, it would obviously be infinitely wiser for him to remain at home. Hidden, however, in the heart of the confusion he encounters here is that which he came so blindly seeking: the terms on which he is related to his country, and to the world. This, which has so grandiose and general a ring, is, in fact, most personal—the American confusion seeming to be based on the very nearly unconscious assumption that it is possible to consider the person apart from all the forces which have produced him. This assumption, however, is itself based on nothing less than our history, which is the history of the total, and willing, alienation of entire peoples from their forebears. What is overwhelmingly clear, it seems, to everyone but ourselves is that this history has created an entirely unprecedented people, with a unique

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and individual past. It is, indeed, this past which has thrust upon us our present, so troubling role. It is the past lived on the American continent, as against that other past, irrecoverable now on the shores of Europe, which must sustain us in the present. The truth about that past is not that it is too brief, or too superficial, but only that we, having turned our faces so resolutely away from it, have never demanded from it what it has to give. It is this demand which the American student in Paris is forced, at length, to make, for he has otherwise no identity, no reason for being here, nothing to sustain him here. From the vantage point of Europe he discovers his own country. And this is a discovery which not only brings to an end the alienation of the American from himself, but which also makes clear to him, for the first time, the extent of his involvement in the life of Europe.

James Baldwin

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THEATER CHRONICLE

THE DRAMA: AN EXTINCT SPECIES?

Nobody denies that something is wrong. People have been saying that it's because the theater is badly organized, and other people have been replying: not at all, it's simply that there's a dearth of good plays. There being a great deal of obvious truth on both sides, it may be wise to sort out some of the points.

To begin with "good plays." We are concerned with two orders of merit not always clearly enough distinguished: talent and genius. Genius lies to a great extent outside any useful discussion because nothing we can say or do will produce it. It comes uncalled for or not at all. What can be discussed is the welcome we give it. And the sad fact is that we welcome it too little and too late. We welcome it when it is safe to do so, when it is practically impossible *not* to do so. The great modern example is Bernard Shaw. To have welcomed him in the 1890s, when he was dangerous, would have been enterprising. To accept him after 1910, as the theater mostly did, was to accept the accepted. By that time the public had learned how to ward off Shaw's blows: critics thought him a clown, admirers thought him a classic; whichever way you look at it, he was through.

Since the death of Shaw, how many geniuses are left in the field? Readers will agree that they are few, even if they don't accept my nominations. And among the few I should have liked to nominate, some are not accurately defined as playwrights. Charlie Chaplin and Eduardo de Filippo, though they have taken on the dramatist's chores and performed them admirably, achieve greatness in the composite capacity of actor-playwright, a special and indissoluble union of actor, role, and author. I am left, it seems to me, with but two names: Bertolt Brecht and Sean O'Casey. Yet even two are enough to make us modify the proposition that there are no new plays for us to do. The plays are there. The question is why we don't do them. The answer cannot lie wholly in their authors' politics which are not (for present purposes) very different from Bernard Shaw's. It lies, rather, in time: Brecht and O'Casey are now where Shaw was before 1910. When they have "dated," Broadway will no doubt announce that they are "timely."

Genius, notoriously, is tardily recognized in all the arts, and, though

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tardiness is doubly unfortunate in an art of the present moment like the theater, we cannot be surprised at it. Surprise should rather be reserved for the fact that there is genius in the offing at all. If the history of economics goes slump: boom, slump: boom, the history of playwriting, one is tempted to say, goes slump slump slump. The dramatic critic is not called upon to explain why at any given moment there are no great playwrights. Empirical reasoning would more probably lead him to argue that there could never be a great playwright, just as empirical reasoning would lead a moralist to argue that there could never be a saint. You are not surprised to find money changers in the temple; the surprising sight is Christ with a whip. You are amazed at Shakespeare and Ibsen; Thomas Dekker and Henry Arthur Jones you take for granted.

However—or rather, consequently—it is much more with the Dekkers and Joneses that we must be concerned. They, if anyone, are our regular standbys; their presence is not just an occasional blessing, it is something we require; it belongs to the minimum demands of theater. In a world of 2,000,000,000 inhabitants, it is fair to assume that there are always thousands of them. This means that if we can justly complain of a dearth of plays, we are not so much protesting that very little genius exists as implying that talent, though it exists, is being deflected into other channels. The Dekkers and Joneses exist but are not writing plays.

So much the better for them. It is all too likely that the artistic impulse—the dramatic impulse particularly—can best find satisfaction today outside the arts altogether. There is the drama of science; and even the drama of politics need not be contemptible. Among our young people I find the artistic temperament, characterized by moral sensibility, vital energy, and emotional flexibility, in undergraduates who will be chemists, lawyers, and doctors, more than in graduate students who will be professionally preoccupied with the arts. Those in whom the need for literary expression is irrepressible write fiction or poetry, in either of which modes they can work unbullied by boobs, and in one of which they might even make a living. (Sometimes I think all our poetic and fictional talent today is dramatic talent scared away by the mediocrity of the theater. Certainly, if Mr. Hemingway or Robert Penn Warren could devote ten years to theatrical work they could write even the best of our playwrights off the stage.)

Nor can anyone pretend that TV and the movies attract only the less gifted. The time has gone by, if it ever existed, when the average film is inferior to the average play. Indeed certain stage forms have

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

been superseded and rendered obsolete by the movies. Once *A Prisoner of Zenda* has been on the screen, you would never want to see it on the stage. Pictures like *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* and *High Noon* transcend all the theater's efforts to present adventure. I can explain the drama critics' enthusiasm for the recent thriller *Dial M for Murder* only on the assumption that they don't go to the movies. People who can see Humphrey Bogart at the corner movie for seventy cents would be fools to trail downtown and pay several dollars to see something in the same genre and not in the same class.

In short, along with the theater public, playwriting talent has been deflected into TV, the movies, poetry, the novel, or out of the arts altogether, with the result that (to coin a phrase) "there is no American drama." There is a lack not only of Shakespeares and O'Caseys but also of Dekkers and Joneses. In America playwriting is not yet a profession.

Playwriting may be said to be a profession when playwrights of high average talent are given their chance, their chance being production by performers who also constitute a profession. The American theater does not consistently offer playwrights this chance. A play cannot be produced on Broadway unless its producers think it has a good chance of running for a year. Plays of "mere promise" are excluded; the theater is a place where promises are not kept. Hence, though there is a place for the playwright to "succeed," there is no place for him to begin or to develop. When young he can serve no apprenticeship; as he grows older he can maintain no continuity.

It has been said: "Without *Titus Andronicus,* no *Hamlet.*" Yet if a Shakespeare came along today, what would happen? Either *Titus* would never get produced at all; or it would be a flop and drive the Bard to drink, teaching, and TV; or it would be a hit, and the poet would spend an anxious lifetime writing twenty more *Tituses.*

A profession of playwrights, I have intimated, presupposes a profession of actors. Despite Actors' Equity Association, there is no such profession, there are merely some arrangements to stop employers running off with their workers' wages. An adequate definition of an acting profession would include what the French understand by *métier*—a standard of workmanship that you achieve by joining the group and by practice; as with playwrights, the lack is apprenticeship in the beginning and continuity later. You do not know what the art of acting is capable of unless you have seen an ensemble of players who have worked together, year in, year out. Nor is there any adequate substitute, in the training of an individual actor, for the performance of dozens or hundreds of real roles (the epithet *real* being inserted here to dis-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

qualify parts written by the many authors, not in TV alone, who do not know what a role is).

In the matter of acting, America has much to learn from some other countries, notably France, Germany, and Russia. (I don't know enough about the Orient to justify any Eastern representation.) In the matter of playwriting, I know of but one country where things are, perhaps, in a healthier state than here, and that is France. Only in Paris, it seems to me, have we today the impression that playwriting is a profession. A literate play stands the same chance of professional performance that, with us, a novel stands of publication. There is consequently a large band of playwrights who in Paris are regular and commercial and over here are (or would be) avant-garde; for example, Achard, Anouilh, Obey, Salacrou. There is also an overlap with poetry and the novel, as the names of Cocteau, Mauriac, Montherlant, and Sartre testify. Even the most "unplayable" poet is played: I saw *Le Soulier de Satin* and *Partage de Midi* lavishly staged in two of the largest Paris theaters.

In England an "unpopular" poet like M. Claudel might well be broadcast on the Third Programme; he'd never reach the West End stage unless he were willing, like Mr. Eliot in *The Cocktail Party,* to reach it on its own terms. Shakespeare continues to use up the best energies of English theater. London produces him and ignores Mr. O'Casey today, exactly as it produced him and ignored Shaw in the '90s. Italy, ever as poor in drama as she is rich in theatricality, is finding that a profession of playwrights cannot be legislated into existence even with the help of subsidies. Germany is the living proof that a well-organized and decentralized repertory system does not necessarily—or at any rate immediately—produce its own dramatists. It is amazing to think for how little time the German theaters were not playing. Goebbels closed them when he proclaimed total mobilization in 1944. By 1945 most of them were destroyed by bombs anyway. But the actors were at work again as soon as the war ended. Since then, the old buildings have been repaired or new ones built. That there are no new playwrights only proves that there is a deeper damage than that of air raids. Somewhere a nerve had been cut.

Soviet Russia I do not know at first hand. Russian movies suggest directly, reports of reliable witnesses suggest indirectly, that the Russians still have the greatest profession of actors in the world. What one knows of their playwrights is less pleasant. If the degree of organization were the criterion, I imagine the Russian playwrights are the most "professional" in the world. But if the criterion is organization at all, it is organization to a certain end, namely, enabling playwrights to grow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to their full stature. Russia offsets the gift of a fabulous theater and a good living with a heavy price in restrictions. To anyone who remarks that Shakespeare also worked under a censorship, I can only reply that it is open to anyone to compare Elizabethan with Soviet censorship, both as to the regulations and their enforcement. In such a comparison the Queen, and even the Puritan city fathers with whom she had little in common, will make a good showing. If some of the Puritans would have been as strict as Stalin had they had the opportunity, it remains important that they did not have the opportunity.

The comparison of the two epochs and regimes could not be made at all except that we still tend to think of censorship in an old-fashioned way. We think of particular acts of censorship, the striking out of a forbidden word, the banning of a book. We have barely realized that a greater efficiency in censorship has brought in its train a new mentality both for the censors and their victims. I have in mind not only the more macabre horrors of the situation but also the prosaic dullness of Soviet intellectuals. It resembles all too closely the dullness of the bourgeoisie against which all left-wing movements, as far as the intelligentsia is concerned, were a revolt.

Not long ago, two American playwrights said in the *New York Times* that the American drama was threatened by the totalitarian mentality—in this case represented by the anti-red Senator McCarthy. One of them—Arthur Miller—seemed to feel that the American playwright can no longer speak freely, the other—oddly enough, James Thurber—that he can no longer even breathe freely—freely enough to relax and be funny.[1] Both statements have value as warnings, yet I cannot see that they have as yet much substance in fact. Satiric or other comedy may presuppose more freedom than at present exists in Russia, I cannot see—thinking of Aristophanes and Molière—that it presupposes more freedom than at present exists in America, even granting a harsh estimate of how much that is. And in what sense have our playwrights lost their freedom of speech? It would, I suppose, be impossible for a Communist playwright to find backers, just as it would have been

1 "The constant open season on writers has seriously depressed literature in America. It has taken the exuberance and gaiety out of the theater. . . . Playwrights may come out of hiding and start working happily again if they hear the old reassuring sound of America laughing; but if the subpoenas for Hellman and Odets are the beginning of an endless probe of Broadway, then the American theater cannot be saved and will die" ("Dark Suspicions," by James Thurber, *New York Times,* July 27, 1952). It is fair to add that Clifford Odets is less in agreement with Arthur Miller and Miss Hellman than with Mr. Kazan, that is to say, he believed his duty was not to go into hiding but to talk.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impossible for a fascist playwright to find backers at any time between 1930 and 1945. Even so the only American Communist play I know of during the past several years had a small New York production and full-scale production in Iron Curtain countries which presumably paid royalties. Is the present plea for freedom of speech a plea for any opinions other than Communist opinions? Or is the complaint that any unorthodox opinion is dubbed Communist? If that's it, the unjustly accused playwright deserves our sympathy and help, like the unjustly accused actor or professor. What I cannot see is how dramaturgy suffers.

A radical playwright, in any case, can't have it both ways: he can't make his living by flinging accusations at established society and then tell society it is taking his living away if it flings some accusations back. In the past it has been very safe on Broadway to hold dangerous views,[2] and the result has been a spate of easy virtue; the only playwright who couldn't have got his plays put on would have been the anti-liberal; on the Negro question, for example, Broadway has its own strict orthodoxy. I sometimes think the Broadway radical is one of the most pampered members of the community. Though an unpampered one said, when a play of his was rejected, "Well, you don't expect them to pay for their own liquidation," the pampered ones may be defined as those who expect just that.

In any event, one must look at a much longer span of time than Messrs. Thurber and Miller were considering. The impression we have of "decline" over a period of five or even ten years is reversed as soon as one play we like comes along. I agree that *The Male Animal* is better than the comedies of recent seasons, but there may be a better one than *The Male Animal* at any moment (by Mr. Thurber, for all I know). Pondering the American theater since 1900 one is bound to long for plays better than any on the whole record. Before 1918, after all, the American drama was almost moronic. The improvement in the '20s was so great it rather naturally went to everyone's head. O'Neill was thought to have superseded Ibsen, and to be comparable, rather, to Shakespeare and Aeschylus. I respect several of the critics who carried on in this way and have been relieved to discover that, when challenged, they retract their hyperboles and hence call for no refutation from the rest of us. There was no Elizabethan age, there were not even any Shaws, Chekhovs, and Strindbergs, but there were the Provincetown, the Guild, the Group Theatre, the Mercury, the Federal Theatre. At

2 And Arthur Miller is indignant that it should now be otherwise. He protests that circumstances make "it dangerous to dare and worse still, impractical" (Many Writers, Few Plays," *New York Times,* August 10, 1952).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

least there were some playwrights, even if there could not, all at once, be a profession of playwriting. There were theaters with the *idea* of continuity in them: from this germ, if at all, must grow an acting profession.

And now what? Circumstances continue to be against the playwright. Production in New York grows more and more expensive, public abasement before the eight daily reporters more and more abject. The government of Eisenhower is not likely to pick up a federal theater which even a Democratic congress let fall. The American National Theatre and Academy is interested, I am told, in decentralizing the theater and depriving New York of its monopoly. Whether they know how this could be done, or whether, if so, they can do it, is another matter. However, it is probably worthwhile to support ANTA; not knowing what "the one thing necessary is" we must perforce try everything. Every effort in the direction of a professional theater, a theater with continuity, must be backed up.

Can our efforts be crowned with success? Certainly, the facts wouldn't lead one to expect so, nor have I (or other people, apparently) a plan for the conquest of the facts. I console myself, on the other hand, with the reflection that drama—drama of talent, let alone drama of genius—has not come in the past by prescription, nor was it predictable. The professions of playwriting and acting which Shakespeare entered as a young man had not existed much more than a generation before him. Dramatic history can be swift, especially when the preparations have been made; and the activity of 1900-1950 in America might certainly be regarded as preparatory. What is more, if drama died easy, it would already be dead. Dramatic art has a powerful hold on quite a number of people. And if now I seem to be working up an optimistic peroration, I would ask: what *can* I think? If you were a pterodactyl of the decadence, no one could expect you to talk in the tone of retrospective biology. Your business would be to die; and you can die with all the more dignity if you think you're not going to die at all.

Eric Bentley

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

McCARTHY AND HIS APOLOGISTS

McCARTHY AND HIS ENEMIES. By William F. Buckley, Jr., and L. Brent Bozell. Regnery. $5.00.

A couple of years ago, William F. Buckley, Jr., Yale '50, wrote a book, *God and Man at Yale,* that surprisingly made the best-seller lists for a while. Maybe there are more Yale men around than one likes to think, maybe the lavish promotion financed by the author's wealthy father was responsible. Or perhaps the public was intrigued by the novelty of a brash and iconoclastic young intellectual challenging the academic powers-that-be from the right, for Buckley's complaint was that Yale is now a hotbed of irreligion and what he called socialism—i.e., Keynesian economics and New Deal liberalism. At any rate, the unexpected success of the book—helped along by a notably obtuse counter-campaign by the Yale authorities—plus his own clever pen and tongue soon made Buckley into a prominent spokesman for the lunatic fringe of "anti-Communism" (the quotes are not accidental). His combination of cynicism, opportunism, and fanaticism was effective, if disturbing. When a friend asked him how he could defend on a radio program Lait and Mortimer's gutter-sniping *USA Confidential,* he replied, "I don't like the way the book is written any more than you do. But it's on *our* side. . . . And anyway you've got to write that way to reach a big public." He also wrote an article in the *Freeman* arguing that "we must support McCarthy" despite his "manners" because his demagogy is (a) no worse than that of Roosevelt and Truman (which I deny), and (b) it is effective. "Young Mr. Buckley is getting into low company," I wrote in an examination of his career in *The Reporter* for May 27, 1952, and expressed a fatherly hope he would straighten out as he grew up.

The hope has alas not been fulfilled. Now he and his brother-in-law have written an apologia for McCarthyism that has made the best-seller lists as did *God and Man at Yale.* But unlike that book, whose style was lively and whose thesis, though exaggerated, was at least plausible (since Yale like most universities has indeed sadly fallen away from the faith of our forefathers in God and free enterprise), the present volume is dull in style and weak, not to use a less polite term, in its main conten-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion. It is, in fact, a remarkably silly book. It is silly—or, if you prefer a more elevated term with existentialist overtones, absurd—because (1) it is intended as a defense of McCarthy but in fact tends to confirm the main charge against him, which is that he is a chronic (in my own opinion, a pathological) liar; and (2) it defends a coarse demagogue in an elegantly academic style replete with nice discriminations and pedantic hair-splittings, giving the general effect of a brief by Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft on behalf of a pickpocket arrested in a subway men's room.

The latter absurdity comes out with specially comic force in Appendix F, which is devoted to "The George Marshall Episode." Until the recent invitation to Army officers to break the law and disobey their superiors by feeding McCarthy classified material, the Senator's 60,000 word speech on June 14, 1951, denouncing General George Marshall, quondam Chief of Staff and at the time Secretary of State, as a traitor working for the Kremlin was the most dramatic example of McCarthy's demagogic impudence. The crucial passage ran as follows:

> How can we account for the present situation unless we believe that men high in the Government are concerting to deliver us to disaster? This must be the product of a great conspiracy, a conspiracy on a scale so immense as to dwarf any previous such venture in the history of man. A conspiracy of infamy so black that, when it is finally exposed, its principals shall be forever deserving of the maledictions of all honest men. . . . What can be made of this unbroken series of decisions and acts contributing to the strategy of defeat? They cannot be attributed to incompetence. If Marshall were merely stupid, the laws of probability would dictate that part of his decisions would serve his country's interest.

With their customary show of pained rectitude, the authors quote this classic example of paranoiac demagogy, worthy to stand with efforts by Hitler and the Kremlin along the same line, and admit that, McCarthy's later disclaimers to the contrary notwithstanding, "it is unreasonable to conclude . . . that McCarthy was charging Marshall with anything less than pro-Communism." They go on to cite seventeen actions of Marshall which in their opinion worked for the benefit of Russia and against that of this country (I agree with them in many instances, my admiration for Marshall's brains not being excessive), but conclude that, since each can be explained on grounds of incompetence, since each was approved at the time by many indubitable anti-Communists, and since McCarthy presented no other evidence, there is no reason to believe General Marshall was a traitor. "In studying the record of General Marshall, McCarthy failed to take into account man's irrationality; he forgot that more often than not men stumble into pat-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

terns," they loftily chide, which is like saying Hitler was a careless historiographer when he accepted as authentic the Protocols of Zion. "As regards his imputation of treasonable motives to Marshall, McCarthy deserves to be criticized. . . . McCarthy's judgment here was bad." As if the essence of the Senator's method was not the attribution of disloyalty to his opponents! As if, like Hitler and the Communists, it were not a matter both of neurotic compulsion and of demagogic expediency always to smear his opponents as not just mistaken or stupid but as wicked, conspiratorial, traitorous! And as if such tactics were not largely responsible for McCarthy's success in getting headlines! If he had confined himself to the truth about Owen Lattimore, which is that, as the sober and painstaking reports of the McCarran Committee copiously document, Lattimore was a devious and energetic pro-Communist propagandist—if he had stuck to that, instead of charging (without ever adducing any evidence) that Lattimore was "the No. 1 Soviet espionage agent in this country," how many headlines would that particular gambit have reaped? Throughout their book, the authors are constantly admonishing their client—not their hero, for, as Richard Rovere has shrewdly pointed out, they obviously regard McCarthy with considerable distaste, personally that is, as against politically—to stick more closely to the facts (the chariot race in *Ben Hur* could take place in the space between McCarthy and any given fact), not to impugn people's loyalty without proof, and in general to behave in a slightly more civilized manner. There is something very droll in the spectacle of these two young doctrinaires teaching an old pro how to get ahead.

As for the delicate matter of McCarthy's lies, the authors grimly admit no less than 34 instances of what they call "inaccuracies," "exaggerations," or "misstatements," ranging from such big lies as his famous "57 card-carrying Communists in the State Department" to such peccadilloes (for McCarthy) as his smearing Drew Pearson as a Communist agent.[1] It is to the authors' credit that they admit so many lies, but it would be more so if they called them that and if they showed any indignation or even concern about them. In fact, their tactic vis-à-vis McCarthy's wholesale lying reminds me ironically of the method developed by the liberal weeklies in the '30s for dealing with the seamier

1 The count would be doubled if we include the 38 (out of a total of 81) cases of alleged security risks in the State Department in which the authors admit, on page 60, that their client was "guilty of exaggeration." And there are, of course, many, many other lies McCarthy has told to date which either occurred outside the rather narrow scope of this book or else are not admitted to have been lies by the authors. For the curious, or the skeptical, the 34 lies mentioned are described on the following pages: 51, 52, 58, 60, 65, 79, 80 (2), 81, 89 (2), 90 (2), 101, 109, 117, 118, 127, 130, 153, 209, 276 (2), 277, 291, 295, 296, 297 (2), 298 (2), 313, 388 (2).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

side of Soviet Communism: admit the facts when you have to, but always reprove them gently as "mistakes" or "excesses of enthusiasm" and never damn them as something evil. Freda Kirchwey could go on for columns that way about the Moscow Trials—wasn't it just too obtuse of that nice old Stalin not to understand that if he hoped to convince the Western mind, weakened by centuries of Anglo-Saxon common law, he would have to produce some evidence? It never occurred to the dear lady that maybe Stalin just didn't have any evidence to produce, just as it never occurs to the dear boys that maybe McCarthy commits so many "inaccuracies" not out of carelessness but on the contrary from the most deliberate, and to date highly successful, calculation.

The authors' apologies fall into roughly three categories. (1) *Tactical Error*: "McCarthy got off on the wrong foot"; "McCarthy . . . took an unnecessarily hard row to hoe." (In the *Nation* this used to run, "It is doubtful whether such severe repressions of the peasantry in the long run serve the interests of the Kremlin as well as a more moderate policy would.") (2) *Over-Enthusiasm*: "Early in 1952, Senator McCarthy learned that copies of Edmund Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County* were being forwarded to Europe at government expense. Impulsively and absurdly, McCarthy denounced government sponsorship of books which "follow the Communist Party line"—although it is notorious that Wilson turned his back on the Communists in the '30s and . . . the book is no more pro-Communist than the author. . . . Here McCarthy was reckless." ("Excess of revolutionary zeal," the *Nation* used to put it, never failing, however, to concede that "you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.") (3) *It's a Wicked World*: "Such interpolations, [i.e., putting his own words as direct quotes by his victim] to be sure, pay scant heed to the rules of scholarship. But to condemn McCarthy on the strength of these rules is to judge him by unusual standards . . . to demand . . . a norm of behavior not subscribed to by other politicians and, for better or worse, not expected of them." (The *Nation*: "It would be a mistake to let our abhorrence of the Communists' putsch overthrowing the Benes government blind us to the fact that political morality is rarely on the level of personal ethics. Nor should we forget England's long and shameful record in India.")

At several points, the authors rebuke McCarthy for his "exaggerations" and "misstatements," on grounds not of morality but of expediency. Such tactics, they correctly maintain, make it harder to get rid of the Communists. Thus, apropos McCarthy's "blunder" in lying himself blue in the face about the mythical 57 card-carrying Communists in the State Department, they ponderously opine: "McCarthy's blunder would prove costly. His specific charges, just to the extent they were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

incautious [!], would make a cleanup more difficult because attention would be drawn away from loyalty *risks* (the real problem) to Communist Party card-holders (a marginal aspect of the real problem)." Such blindness to the No. 1 Fact of Life about Senator McCarthy—that his aim is not to focus attention on security risks or on Communists but on Senator McCarthy, so that exposing Communists is a means *ad majorem gloriam McCarthii* and not an end in itself, hence can be sacrificed when it conflicts with the end—this might lead unkind persons to conclude the boys are a couple of shysters. I prefer to think them honestly naive.

Despite its title, only about one-sixth of the book (73 pages out of a total 413) is about McCarthy and his enemies—that is, a general consideration of McCarthyism. The rest is an excessively dry and legalistic brief for the prosecution in the case of *McCarthy v. U.S. State Dept.* Their method is formalistic, abstract, and, despite a great display of documentation, quite incapable of coming to grips with reality.[2] In tedious detail—tedious because these are lawyers' (or debaters') "points" and not the kind of details that illuminate reality—the authors arraign the State Department's security program, try to show that McCarthy was right in general even though inaccurate in almost any given particular, and expose the Tydings investigation as a partisan whitewash of the Department. On the Tydings Committee, I'm forced by the evidence to pretty much agree with them—its Democratic majority seemed no more genuinely interested in whether in fact there were security risks still in the Department than McCarthy himself. But on the main question, how effectively the Truman administration cleaned out security risks from State, I can't adopt their gloomy view, mostly because their definition of a security risk seems to cover almost any one who in the '30s was politically conscious—as we used to say in those dear departed days—including myself. But even if State was as infested with security risks as the authors claim, this does not justify

2 For example, on pp. 208-9, they have a couple of paragraphs on "McCarthy's Case Number 54," Val R. Lorwin, which concludes with the information that last year he was indicted for perjury for denying he had ever been a Communist Party member. It happens that the Department of Justice the other day withdrew the charge and fired the lawyer who had prepared the case (and who had stated to the jury that the defendant had said he would invoke the Fifth Amendment and that two FBI witnesses would testify against him—the facts being there were no FBI witnesses and Mr. Lorwin had stated under oath he had never been a Communist). The authors, of course, can't be reproached for this unfortunate outcome of Case Number 54, but they can be asked why they failed to uncover the easily ascertainable facts about Mr. Lorwin: that he was an active Socialist in the '30s (Norman Thomas testified for him), has a long and uninterrupted record of anti-Communist activities, and that the whole insane charge came of a joking remark he made at a party.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

McCarthy's wrecking operation. If the choice was between McCarthy's method of cleaning up the Department and leaving it dirty and risk-infested, it might have been better to take the second alternative, since in that case we should still have had a State Department instead of the demoralized, panicky, confused mob of shock victims Mr. Dulles now presides over. (This is assuming a State Department is necessary at all, an assumption which at times McCarthy and the authors don't seem to grant.) In any event, it is a nice point whether a score of Hisses could have sabotaged State as thoroughly as the methods McCarthy has used to get them out. (This is assuming he is interested in reforming the Department—as against making political capital out of pretending to do so—which I for my part most definitely do not grant.) Finally, reducing the question of McCarthyism to the campaign against the State Department, as the authors do, is an intolerably narrow framework of discourse, rather as if Nazism should be treated only in terms of Hitler's demand for revision of the Versailles Treaty.

Like Gogol's Chichikov, McCarthy is a dealer in dead souls. His targets are not actual, living, breathing Communists but rather people who once were or may have been or were not but may be made to appear to have possibly once been Communists or sympathizers or at any rate suspiciously 'soft' on the question. Like some D.A.R. who has dreamt over her (alleged) eighteenth-century revolutionary ancestors until they are more real to her than her butcher, McCarthy has brooded over *his* (alleged) revolutionaries of a past era until they are more real to him than, say, Howard Fast. (Not that Mr. Fast or his comrades are revolutionaries, quite the contrary indeed, despite McCarthy's best efforts to confer that respectable title on them.) Are there, indeed, any flesh-and-blood Communists extant today *besides* Mr. Fast? Reason and evidence say yes, but at times McCarthy's operations almost persuade one there aren't. Single-handed, he has wrought a great change in our political atmosphere. Before he began to expose Franklin D. Roosevelt's Twenty Years of Treason, in that idyllic era of the Hiss case when tangible evidence was frequently produced, there were times when one wondered if anyone in New Deal Washington had been really anti-Communist. By now, one wonders whether any one had been really pro-Communist. In each instance, a series of startling revelations exploded, like a string of firecrackers, with cumulative effect though with opposite political meanings. Where each day used to bring its startling vindication of some fantastic charge by Bentley or Chambers, today each morning sees another McCarthy exposé of Communist activity pop like a pricked balloon. If McCarthy keeps on much longer, one will begin to doubt the very existence of the Soviet Union.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Chichikov had his Gogol, but McCarthy has yet to find his. Meanwhile, Messrs. Buckley and Bozell will do very well as minor comic characters in the mock-heroic epic of McCarthyism, an interlude in our political history so weird and wonderful that future archeologists may well assign it to mythology rather than history.

Dwight Macdonald

A TALL EPIGRAM

PICTURES FROM AN INSTITUTION. By Randall Jarrell. Knopf. $3.50.

I don't know when colleges first began to give courses in creative writing (as distinct from English Composition): the practice was already established when I went to school. Those who taught these courses were generally young writers themselves. Literature profited from this arrangement by a spate of short stories about the relations of instructor and student written by the former—it certainly did not profit from the students' side, at least in any observable way, the results of writing courses, like the results of psychoanalysis, being impossible to ascertain with any assurance. Since then more and more writers have been invited to join teaching staffs, especially by the progressive colleges, and another genre of story promises to arise in which the writer-teacher bites the hand that fed him for a semester or so.

Randall Jarrell's gallery of *Pictures from an Institution*—it is not a novel—is in this genre. He snaps amusingly at the institutional hand of Benton, a progressive college half of whose "campus was designed by Bottom the Weaver, half by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe." But, as we shall see, when his teeth do close on its fingers it is only to forbear and merely scratch the skin. Mr. Jarrell's book contains an innovation. *Pictures from an Institution* is not only a case of biting-the-hand, but also of the biter bit: the chief person satirized is a fellow writer-teacher, Gertrude Johnson, who is herself writing a satirical novel about Benton—a woman, we are told, who greatly admires Swift but cannot understand why he suddenly went soft on the Houyhnhnms.

Mr. Jarrell has a well-deserved reputation for wit; he lives up to it, he more than lives up to it, in this book, fulfilling and overfulfilling his quota on every page. He is best, however, with the formidable Gertrude, whose great fault as a writer was that "she did not know—or rather, did not believe—what it was like to be a human being." When the suffering president of the college (a former Olympic diving cham-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pion, a sort of enlightened stuffed sport shirt) remarks, with forced good nature, that Gertrude's bark is worse than her bite, the author comments: "This was foolish—Gertrude's bark *was* her bite; and many a bite has lain awake all night longing to be Gertrude's bark." I am tempted to hail this as, at last, the American epigram: American in its farfetchedness and humorous overstatement, and yet neat and contained as an epigram should be. We have had the tall story; this is the tall epigram.

But the whole book is not as good as its parts, the chapters are not as good as the paragraphs and sentences. The *mots* and metaphors collect like pebbles in a heap; at the end there is just the heap of sparkling pebbles. But why isn't a lot of wit good enough? The trouble is with the form of the book. *Pictures from an Institution* is not a novel, as I have said, but it arouses some of the expectations of one. It starts like a story, but there is none—just the machine-gun rattle of witty definitions and descriptions. Its people start out like the people of a novel, but then get defined right off in a *mot*; their types are summed up neatly enough, but their life is missed, and the meaning is the same at the last as in the beginning. What was wanted, perhaps, was a kind of form that fulfilled itself in this play of witticism and epigram; but what exactly this form might be I do not know.

On Benton, the college itself, Mr. Jarrell is least satisfactory. "Most of the people of Benton would have swallowed a porcupine, if you had dyed its quills, and called it Modern Art; they longed for men to be discovered on the moon, so that they could show that they weren't prejudiced toward moon men; and they were so liberal and selfless, politically, that—but what words of men, or tongue of man or angel, can I find adequate to this great theme?" This doesn't really say much. The truth is that the author has hardly more to tell about Benton's liberalism than that it is absurd—"the absurdities of Benton were so absurd." Benton's liberals are just reactionaries turned inside out, and vice-versa: "In the world outside one met many people who were negatives of the people of Benton: exact duplications, but the whites and blacks reversed. They were people who thought anything but calendars and official portraits Modern Art, and spoke of it with exasperated hatred; people who wrote to the Chicago *Tribune* to denounce it for the radical stand it had taken on some issue. . . ." This is to miss the huge gap separating the prejudices of reactionaries—a sort of unquestioned sense of things—from an ideology of cultural and political self-righteousness; it is, also, to miss Benton.

On this point I find Mary McCarthy's *Groves of Academe* a much superior book. Miss McCarthy's plot—a rascally queer fish of an in-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

structor at a progressive college falsely claims to be a Communist when the president (author of a pamphlet, "The Witch Hunt in Our Universities") notifies him that his contract will not be renewed, causing his colleagues to rally to the defense of academic freedom so that in the end it is the hapless president and not the instructor who is forced to leave—shows a highly amusing grasp of doctrinaire liberalism. (The main trouble with the *Groves of Academe* is that the conception goes in one direction and the execution in another: the clever person who sees through the hoax is scored off with harsh irony, apparently because he is clever, whereas the liberal victims, whom the plot would seem to be aiming at, are treated with considerable tenderness.) Mr. Jarrell, I am afraid, lacks this kind of satiric understanding of the liberal ideology. In the end he forgives Benton its absurdities, for he has no other grounds for mocking it, and absurdity is a fault that the charitable and loving—as opposed to the malignant and unloving Gertrude Johnsons—can easily forgive. There is more than a touch of unction here. "I felt that I had misjudged Benton, somehow—for if I had misjudged Miss Rasmussen so [the absurd sculptress-in-residence who specializes in welding "root-systems of alfalfa plants," but suddenly produces an inspired work], why not the rest of Benton? . . ." This is the moral of the book, but it rings false. How does Mr. Jarrell know that Miss Rasmussen's piece of sculpture is great? He just looks at it and knows. But we know that the perception of greatness comes harder than that. In the same way, the lovingkindness with which the author accepts Benton and the world at the end, in studied contrast with Gertrude Johnson's inability to love, strikes one as complacent and false. Love, too, comes harder than that. It isn't there just because Mr. Jarrell, who knows the right thing to say, says it's there.

Martin Greenberg

GOD'S COUNTRY AND MR. KRONENBERGER

GOD'S COUNTRY AND MINE. By Jacques Barzun. Little, Brown. $5.00.
COMPANY MANNERS. By Louis Kronenberger. Bobbs, Merrill. $3.00.

It is hard to imagine two books which are at once more alike and more different. The difference is obvious enough: it is that Mr. Barzun thinks the state of American culture pretty good and Mr. Kronenberger thinks it terrible. But the similarity is almost equally plain: it is that they are manifestly describing the *same* American culture, and that they approach this culture from much the same background and presup-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

positions. Both Mr. Barzun and Mr. Kronenberger are well known for wit, grace, urbanity, erudition lightly borne, etc. Both inoculated by a knowledge of history against the temptations of current modishness, each in his own way has maintained a high level of individual vivacity and of critical independence against highbrow and lowbrow rages alike. They are, in short, free-spirited and genuinely humane critics, operating out of much the same cultural and temperamental prepossessions. Yet they could hardly have come to more contradictory conclusions about the prospects of American civilization.

Mr. Barzun subtitles his book, with fair accuracy, "A Declaration of Love Spiced With a Few Harsh Words." It is a warm-hearted, shrewd, generous and voluble book, based on the assumption that modern industrial society is here to stay, and that, in time, people will make the best of it. America, in a sense, becomes for Mr. Barzun the archetype of mass society—possessed by the mass, civilized by the mass, run by underdogs, refugees and nobodies, dedicated to the abolition of differences and the equalizing of conditions. Much is lost, Mr. Barzun readily concedes, in the transformation to a mass society; but more is gained—not only the immense productivity of the machine, which for the first time gives everyone the hope of a decent life, but the release of human energy and aspiration which comes from a society that includes everybody. "We must not forget that what we have undertaken, no other society has tried: We do not suppress half of mankind to refine part of the other half."

These achievements—the gains in material abundance and in human dignity—are on no account, in Mr. Barzun's view, to be sacrificed. Nothing exasperates him more, and rightly so, than those critics who do not understand that what they complain about in our culture is so often inseparable from our ability to produce goods and our determination to maximize human opportunity. If we want the benefits of industrial democracy, we must pay a price; if we consider the price intolerable, then let us not think that we can carry the benefits on our journey to Utopias of our own.

It is within this premise of general acceptance that Mr. Barzun examines the issues of our culture. He does not conceal his distaste for much of our mechanized mass civilization. "The threat of every machine compels us to dance in tune with it, and the steps are so complicated we jiggle all day long." The machine that feeds us so well denies us our life; modern urban civilization is "the piling up of a crushing load of trifles"; we are condemned to the leading of "statistical lives" which drain us of thought and feeling. Such a civilization tends, in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

end, to breed, not, as is so often charged, materialists and sensualists, but *voyeurs* and fetishists. In a series of bright and probing chapters, Mr. Barzun makes his case specific. The result is devastating.

How, then, does Mr. Barzun put the two sides of his argument together? If we cannot abandon mass society, and yet if we cannot escape the ghastly consequences of mass culture, what hope is there? Another Frenchman coming to America a century before Barzun had a similar sense of the inevitability of democracy and a similar fear of the tyranny of the majority. For Tocqueville, the ultimate hope lay in politics—"in order to combat the evils which equality may produce there is only one effectual remedy—namely, political freedom." For Barzun, however, the equalizing process itself contains the seeds of regeneration.

The frustrations and vulgarities which so afflict us, he suggests, may well be only the phenomena of digestion and transition. In the end, Mr. Barzun is certain, industrial democracy will itself guarantee a new liberation, generate a new creativity. "We often have a clumsy way of going about such matters, but we correct our blunders as we go." In many fields—music, painting, education, research, publishing, industrial design—mass civilization, Mr. Barzun contends, is already leveling upward. "Gradually the grossness purges itself."

Mr. Barzun's moral is thus resolutely optimistic, even though *God's Country and Mine* is more vivid and convincing in attack than in affirmation. As a critic, Mr. Barzun is precise, concrete and lively; as an appreciator, he sometimes errs in the direction of rapture. Someone should issue an edict, for example, forbidding intellectuals to write about baseball. His device of dramatizing cultural situations in terms of people does not always come off, partly because the phonetic rendering of dialect has inevitably a patronizing air, partly because some of the incidents overtax belief a bit too much (has Mr. Barzun ever really run into a Personnel Psychology Cogitationist?). And the book is too long. Yet his capacity for appreciation is not a waste of time. He is an authentic pragmatist and pluralist (or, as he would term himself, a Romantic); which means that he can really understand the American temper; his cheerful arguments for such un-American institutions as polygamy and polytheism are refreshing in this conformist age; and discriminating enthusiasm, which he has in abundance, remains one of the most attractive of qualities. Love, Whitehead somewhere says, is very penetrating; but it penetrates, not to facts, but to possibilities. Thus Mr. Barzun's declaration of love; and a good thing too. He concludes with Scott Fitzgerald's lovely phrase—"America is a willingness of the heart."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mr. Kronenberger's book is quite another matter. It is compact, shapely, crisp, elegant, wicked and often genuinely funny. American life, as he sees it (he really confines himself pretty much to life on Manhattan Island), is essentially a triumph of technique over purpose. Americans are demoralized by speed, obsessed with gadgets, concerned not with the product but with the package, empty of basic intent or direction; the goal is not fulfillment but adjustment. The Age of Anxiety is the signpost of our interior dissolution; the Age of Publicity suggests the unrelenting assault from without. The double pressure has destroyed privacy, corrupted manners, wrecked standards and ushered in the wholesale triumph of vulgarization.

Culture, in such circumstances, is doomed. The film of *Henry V* or a Stokowski transcription of Bach, far from toning up popular taste to a demand for the original, destroys taste; people will "not resist or reject the adulteration, will soon, in fact, come to prefer and eventually to require it." In these terms Mr. Kronenberger casts an exceedingly cold eye on the theater, on television and on other aspects of culture, coming up with indictments which are barely saved by his remorseless urbanity from turning vulgarly into diatribes.

More than this, the very values of living itself have been hopelessly degraded. Our young men and women, instead of starting as poets and becoming advertising men or film writers at forty with a sense of defeat and betrayal, bypass the youthful period of aspiration and crisis and learn right off how to fabricate television scripts or advertising copy. Slick, calculating, career-minded, "they don't compromise, as so many people must, or capitulate, as so many finally do, or become obvious victims of economic pressure. They don't sell out; they are exultant volunteers."

And, if vulgarization is bad, the countervulgarization of the coterie highbrows is no better—the "reversible raincoat of American culture," one side as smooth and as sterile as the other. The academics, the literary critics concerned with microscopic vivisection rather than with human response, the intellectuals whose pride is their nonconformity and their alienation—"they are frequently as hostile to art, to the broad free spirit of culture, as are the philistines themselves." America is thus a "network of conformities," a crisscross of orthodoxies, "a rigidly blueprinted dream, a series of set, established visions." And so between the philistine and the prig, the vulgarization that makes things palatable and the countervulgarization that makes things parched, the individual is starved and flattened; and "culture—in the old-fashioned, well-rounded sense of something civilized and civilizing alike—has not simply failed as a reality in America, but is fast fading as an ideal."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

For Mr. Kronenberger, the base line is evidently the 1920s, when people were gay, exuberant, outrageous, anti-bourgeois, anti-puritan, anti-pedagogical, and overflowing with creativity. Men might pass out over the soup or women strip during the fish course; but, if more people stole one another's wives, fewer stole each other's jobs. For all the frivolity, drunkenness and waste, the young men of the '20s (in Mr. Kronenberger's nostalgia) "were lined up squarely on the side of art and not on the side of money." Thus Mr. Kronenberger's golden age, against which everything contemporary is to be measured, and nearly everything to be found wanting.

His book, indeed, not only invokes the '20s, but exemplifies it. If at times Mr. Kronenberger seems to be rattling off his epigrams with the mechanical imperturbability of a Bob Hope, he represents at his best, a return to an older tradition—to the verbal pyrotechnics of Mencken and Chesterton. How freshly and wittily he does it too, most of the time, and what a pleasure it is to laugh aloud! And what a pleasure too it is to read a book so delightedly, passionately and carelessly contemptuous of contemporary verities. We have had too much in recent years of reverence.

Mr. Barzun and Mr. Kronenberger thus end up by describing the same culture in much the same terms; but, where Mr. Barzun has a faith in the American capacity for self-correction, Mr. Kronenberger sees little hope of improvement. Instead of grossness purging itself, it will only breed more grossness; "however revolted most people of sensibility may still be by all this, they are no longer, certainly, much shocked; and what people begin to expect, and then come to accept, of others they must gradually begin to adopt for themselves." There is no easy way out any longer. "The conflicts go too deep; the governing impetus, the ruling force, has by now too much momentum." In such language, Mr. Kronenberger rejects the whole consoling view that mass society can be counted on to generate the antidote to its own ills.

This is substantially Mr. Barzun's view; and its most brilliant and influential representative these days, of course, is Mr. David Riesman, whose *The Lonely Crowd* is greatly admired by Mr. Barzun (as well as by the writer of this review). But, if the Kronenberger attitude often seems ungenerous and defeatist, clearly the Riesman attitude has its perils too. Indeed, one has (or, at least, I have) recently begun to wonder whether Mr. Riesman, in recoiling against the complacent alienation he ascribes to the typical intellectual, is not risking an equally dangerous acceptance of his own. Mr. Barzun, it should be noted, does not go so far; but, when Mr. Riesman offers the dictum that contem-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

porary America is producing "one of the great cultures of history," he is surely indulging in hyperbole which is not needed in an age so self-congratulatory as our own and not justified in an age so uncreative. In a recent set-to in the *American Scholar,* Mr. Riesman poured much scorn on Mr. Archibald MacLeish for suggesting that freedom of mind and conscience might be under serious attack in the United States. But surely Mr. MacLeish's old-fashioned liberal outrage, so banal in Mr. Riesman's eyes, was perhaps closer both to truth and to therapy in the situation than what seemed Mr. Riesman's attempt to wave away the attack as just an optical illusion epidemic among self-pitying intellectuals (though, one must add, that is certainly a factor in the situation too).

Mr. Riesman, of course, was in part the victim of the problems of communication in a pluralist society: what he said to an audience of American scholars gave a gratification he did not intend to the conservatives who were enabled through *Time* to overhear his remarks. Mr. Riesman has made clear enough elsewhere his recognition that, if the dangers of mass society are self-correcting, it is in part because men like MacLeish rise to denounce them. Similarly the relationship between Mr. Barzun and Mr. Kronenberger is far closer than their contradictory diagnoses of American culture would suggest: it is precisely the Kronenberger fury which justifies the Barzun optimism. If Mr. Barzun turns out to be right (as I believe he will), it will be, to some degree, because the Kronenbergers make him so. In short, to achieve the objectives of the Barzuns and Riesmans—that is, a society which will continuously resist and revise its dominant values—we cannot do without the indignations of Mr. Kronenberger and Mr. MacLeish.

We need them all, and which to salute at any given time is so much a matter of mood. In the '20s, *Company Manners* would have been routine, and *God's Country and Mine* an act of affirmation and liberation. Today *God's Country,* for all its charm and intelligence and understanding, seems almost an act of supererogation; it is most valuable when least ecstatic. In our present mood, *Company Manners,* for all its flipness and smartness and shallowness, is, if the more wrong-headed, still the more invigorating and liberating work, as much perhaps in its wit and style as in its substance. As Mr. Kronenberger constantly suggests, nothing will save us except the revival of direct human responsiveness. He contributes to this, if only by making his readers laugh.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM LIMBO

SEEING AND KNOWING. By Bernard Berenson. Macmillan. $3.50.

If Bernard Berenson seems to us a figure out of another life, it is because he has spent half a century mobilizing his considerable talents against allowing the modifications of history to make a dent in his thinking or sensibility. This would not be a handicap if he had allowed his reputation to rest on his achievements as a scholar and connoisseur of Italian art. But it does mean that he is badly equipped for the new role he has envisaged for himself in the last decade or so: as a critic and elder statesman of modern culture. The truth is that the factuality of the present is barbarous to him, and he long ago adjusted his sensibility into an instrument which could transform the present into figments of the past, as discontinuous with experience as one of his precious madonnas.

The notion that Mr. Berenson is to be taken seriously in this role seems, unhappily, to have gained some currency. It received a sizable boost a couple of years ago when the Readers' Subscription urged *Rumor and Reflection* upon its members. Critics who welcomed that work for its charming habit of discussing the Second World War, the Nazis, the Greek historians and Racine with equal detachment and poise failed to notice how untouched the author had been by concrete events; the only way Mr. Berenson could make anything of his experience as the most secure and comfortable Jewish D.P. in Europe was to translate it into images of the past. But this "past" is more mythical than historical imagination: it removes everything from time, it annihilates the integrity of historical fact, and spreads over all ideas and events a thick syrup of personal vagary. (How really different, too, from Gide's *Journals,* to which *Rumor and Reflection* was compared, which are so alive to the brute factuality of the present.)

Mr. Berenson's latest publication should go a long way toward showing up his essential philistinism and the irrelevance of his opinions on modern culture. *Seeing and Knowing* is an essay of 40 pages, accompanied by 88 plates; if it can be said to have a single coherent subject, it is about the uses of landscape and figure motifs in the whole range of Western art. But Mr. Berenson's observations on this subject (none of them noteworthy in themselves) are all pressed into the service of disparaging the artistic achievements of the last fifty years. Thus, Picasso is "the most remarkable draughtsman still alive (who) has taken every advantage of his skill to hide his true gifts. Perhaps in deepest secret he draws in orthodox fashion everything he bedevils

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

while painting, as I have been assured Joyce wrote out in plain King's English what he fricasséed for his printed prose." He characterizes Joyce's writings as "polyglot etymological puns and soap-bubbles" and cannot understand why a literary review, "supposed to be one of the most authoritative in Great Britain," should compare *Finnegans Wake* to "the deepest Shakespeare." And if anyone still wonders why the carvings of Negro Africa made a crucial impression on Picasso and his generation, Mr. Berenson clears up that matter, too: they were all duped by "a genius of mercantile propaganda" who arrived in Paris with something to sell.

As these examples indicate—and they scarcely begin to exhaust the astonishing amount of foolishness the author has managed to crowd into so few pages—Mr. Berenson's essay is fixed in a posture of certitude which can only be sustained by a complete immunity to the actual events of the art world. Yet, however lamentable we may find his supercilious attitudes and the unfortunate disjunction between scholarship and intelligence which they represent, there is something more to be regretted here: that is, that we really have no critic of the kind Mr. Berenson pretends to be. We seem to have reached a crisis in Western art; the museumization of art (with or without walls) to which André Malraux has written his great tribute—or is it an elegy?—may already be passing into a phase where it no longer liberates, but actually smothers, the imagination. It is the artists and not the critics who will resolve this crisis, of course, but it would certainly be useful to have a critic who could bring the current impasse into focus. But such a critic would have to be firmly attached to contemporary actualities as well as to history;[1] the kind of intellectual limbo from which Mr. Berenson issues his pronouncements tells us nothing.

Thus, it is sheer coincidence that Mr. Berenson's plea for a revitalization of representational art comes at a moment of crisis when such a plea, properly articulated, might have had some relevance. *Seeing and Knowing* was written in 1948, but it might have been written thirty years earlier or ten years later, so unattached is it to the vicissitudes of art history. In this connection, it is worth noting that the painter Joseph Czapski, in the March number of *Encounter,* stated in a few paragraphs the insight that Mr. Berenson has been unable to master throughout his many pronouncements: that modern abstraction may be passing into a decline, as the great styles of the past have done, that, as Mr. Czapski

1 Without succumbing, it must be added, to the kind of historical temptation which has created a widespread notion in America that European culture is washed up and the next important achievements will be American.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

says, "It is already withering in the imitation of primitive art, in an abstract academicism narrower than all previous academisms." (He might have added that in its American phase, it is pursuing this path of decline with a clamor of publicity and self-congratulation not easily matched in the annals of art history.) But of this crisis, Mr. Berenson knows nothing; everything after Cézanne is, for him, a parade of "solemn puerilities," and he is startlingly unable to distinguish, say, between the great work of the Cubists and the decadent mannerisms of the Surrealists. And this failure to make distinctions comes, I suspect, from a fundamental lack of interest which Mr. Berenson ought to have admitted at the start.

As Alfred Kazin remarked in his "Italian Journal" after a conversation with Mr. Berenson in Rome, "I miss that quality which alone makes a thinker interesting, his commitment to the living." That sums it up very well.

Hilton Kramer

Preuves

Revue mensuelle littéraire et politique

JUIN

CLAUDE-EDMONDE MAGNY
L'époque aurée du roman

MARC ALDANOV
L'exterminateur

THIERRY MAULNIER
La fausse symétrie des menaces

GERARD ROSENTHAL
Mathias Lubeck, le poète assassiné

ROBERT COOKE
La politique démographique des Soviets

CHRONIQUES

Herbert TINGSTEN: Afrique du Sud, cap de la désespérance
Norbert MUHLEN: Bonn: Derriére la façade
Paul BARTON: le procés de Bratislava
Gustave STERN: Aspects du syndicalisme américain
Max BERGER: le Corbusier ou le paradoxe profond d'une époque
Claude MAURIAC: Découverte de Goyen

PREUVES:

23, rue de la Pépinière—Paris (VIII°)
CCP 178-00 Le N° de 104 p. ill.
France: 120 Frs—Autres pays: 150 Frs
Un ancien numéro sera envoyé gracieusement sur demande comme specimen.

LIBERAL PRESS, INC.
printers of
PARTISAN REVIEW
•
80 FOURTH AVENUE
NEW YORK 3, N. Y.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(*Continued from page* 370)

they were obviously nearly the same age. "Don't you think he's an old darling, Mr. Amsterdam?"

"He does *not,*" Fenton said emphatically, "and neither do you, you old crow."

"Really!" Demby cried, quite shocked, but trying to pat his wave into place nonchalantly.

"He's drunk, just drunk, you know," Miss Manfred assured him, "isn't he, Mr. Amsterdam?"

I didn't trouble to answer, and she went on, reaching over to strike me a sharp blow just above the heart with two purple fingernails, "But *you,* Mr. Amsterdam, we've been hearing about you! You're a *legend* on this campus, a real legend—the Errol Flynn of the Little Magazines they call you—and all in five days, too. What do you *do* to all those girls? And you a father of eight children—or is it nine, Mr. Amsterdam?"

"He's awful big, boy," Fenton had gone on, ignoring her—and pretending to peer into the dark at Hank, "awful big! Why don't you settle for a cold shower?" Impressed with his own wit, he began to chuckle. "A nice cold shower!"

The odd part of it all was that up until that point, I had done nothing to justify the myth of myself as a Don Juan—nothing at all beyond my initial lie, and my submission to an admiration I had not realized I was courting. Twice after our evenings of talk and beer, I had walked home with one girl or another who had wanted to be kissed by a poet, and I had kissed her, feeling an utter fool on that campus full of couples each recapitulating that childish embrace. It was as if I were reliving my youth, not the one, of course, that I had actually lived at City College in the years of the Depression, but a youth I might have had in another, a realer, a gentile America.

"He's a bouncer in the toughest joint in town, Milton. Maybe you played basketball at City College, son—but he'll . . ."

His voice trailed away incomprehensibly as Judith came toward us shyly out of the knot of students. I had never until that moment thought seriously of making her; her feeling for me had seemed too public and abstract to end in a real embrace, the feeling of a small girl for a movie actor or a handsome priest, an aspect of a legend. But as her shoulder brushed mine, actual flesh against flesh, I could feel desire mount in me, and for a moment I rested one hand gently on her ass.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She did not seem to notice, looking pointedly past me, as she talked to Fenton. "Mr. Fenton, we—Hank and I—were wondering if you could come over for supper day after tomorrow, about six or six-thirty. We've been thinking that you must be missing—well, home cooking and a house with children in it. We don't have five, but I can guarantee our little girl will be up, whatever we do. These—"

"He's drunk," I cut in, a little jealous, and wondering whether that were not perhaps the whole point of the invitation. It irked me to have risen so stupidly to the bait.

"I may be drunk, but I know an invitation when I hear one. I'd be delighted, Mrs. Somers, delighted." He tried to leer, but his face kept collapsing around the effort. "As for the child, strangle it in its cradle, or ship it off to grandma's. My own five children, I'm proud to say, were all accidents—totally unwanted!" He held up the fingers of one hand, apparently by way of illustration, and turned away.

"I'll remind him in the morning," I assured Judith later, when we had left Fenton sagging comfortably between his two friends. "I'm glad you invited him—he seems very lonely. . . ." My voice sounded unconvincing even to me; but she did not appear to be listening.

It was only after the others had all left us, and I was saying good night to Hank and her, that she spoke at last. I had already started to move off with a sense of disappointment that I resented but could not quell, when she came running up the steps of their basement apartment, out of the darkness where Hank still fumbled at the door.

"I just remembered that I may not have invited you yet—the same night for dinner, I mean. But I must have, surely. I must." She was obviously lying, and I resolved to refuse.

"No."

"How silly of me! But you will come, you must— I know how much you must miss your family. Besides, I have a special favor to ask." She paused for a while, but I did not respond. "I want you to look at my husband's poetry." There was something about the way she said "husband" that made me uneasy, a particular emphasis, as if Hank's simple name would not do, only that generic, comic word which put him (and her, too) into my hands.

I said nothing.

"You *will* come, won't you? I'm a good cook. Really! And you must see Hank's poetry. That's the real reason I'm asking you. It's really wonderful, you know. It *is*!" She insisted on the last word, as if my merely embarrassed silence were a scornful dissent. "He needs to be praised— Somebody must tell him how good he is! He's lost all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his confidence and pride, he's . . . I'm coming in a minute!" She interrupted herself to answer Hank's impatient yell.

"But you're not just asking me because—"

"No, no. I want you to come. You *have* to! It's just that I'm an idiot when I talk to you. I'm not really an idiot, you know. It's just—well—I can only explain it like an idiot." She stopped to smile a smile worth all the words she could not find. "You must read his poems; you must like them and tell him so— He really admires you so, though he's shy. He's the one who really wants you to come— You must like them!" She had placed her hands on my shoulders, looking directly into my eyes with her own wet, black ones. "Please say you'll come and look at the poems! It's important for us—for Hank and me— You don't understand, for our life together, for *me*!"

Inside the house, the baby had started to cry and Hank at the door was calling, "Judy, for Christ's sake!"

"I'll come," I said feeling shamed at her excessive look of gratitude, the warmth with which she said, "Oh thank you" and was gone.

It was seven before I arrived at the Somers' apartment. I knew really that it was important I be on time; but I stopped by for Ed Fenton on the way and he insisted that I have a drink. We had three, finally, the first to death, the second to us, the third to goddamall; and found Judith when we arrived quivering and annoyed. Excited, she had a strange smell, not unpleasant really, but arid and thin. Her hands trembled visibly as she reached out to take ours and draw us into the foul little basement apartment, its walls stained with damp, its foreseeable books in their orange crates, its meaningless rickety furniture that had never really belonged to anyone. I had forgotten the look of a graduate student's house, that most dismal of bohemias.

In one corner, Hank squatted on his haunches, leaning over a baby who lay naked and covered with prickly heat on a blanket on the floor. He was fanning the child with a paper fan that read: DRINK HELFEIFER'S BEER! THE BEER OF THE ELITE. A bare electric bulb that dangled on a wire from the cracked ceiling seemed to make the heat visible. I could feel my sweat oozing out, as I entered, like blood from an unstaunched wound.

"It's hot," Judith remarked pointlessly, "and you're late and the roast's overdone. And it's the first roast we've had in a year. How stupid I am!" She tried to laugh. "Oh, excuse me, excuse me, and sit down." She indicated the one easy chair, the two rickety wooden ones—and seemed suddenly near tears.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Take it easy, Jude," Hank called without lifting his head from the baby who stared up hypnotized into his eyes; and with his head still down, added, "Welcome, gentlemen."

We managed somehow to get through dinner, though Judith, trembling still, broke a plate and a cup, barely missed Fenton with some spilled gravy, apologized excessively for the food, kept losing sentences in embarrassed pauses and making malapropisms at which Fenton bellowed with great good humor. I said scarcely anything, not sure why I was there, but watching Hank for a clue, though he in turn never took his eyes from his wife, whom he followed with an inexplicable air of humility, saying over and over like a charm, "Take it easy, Jude."

Once he managed to turn to me long enough to observe, "This is important for Her." He referred to Judith with real capitals like a queen. "She's always nervous over things like this."

But when I, nervous, too, and puzzled, had snapped, "What things?" he cast his eyes down again without answering. The baby cried all through the meal, impersonally but with considerable volume, and Hank rose finally to tend it.

"I'm really sorry about the food," Judith said over the coffee. "I'll bet your wives are both excellent cuisines—I mean, cooks."

"Neither of mine," Fenton answered. "The first one was rich, so we always had a cook. And with the second, I do the little cooking that gets done. Mostly we drink our meals."

"But surely yours, Mr. Amsterdam?"

"Wonderful," I declared shamelessly. I had actually liked Eileen's cooking at first, for its difference from my mother's; the most banal non-kosher foods, tripe or pork sausages or head cheese, seeming to me a kind of revolt, a rejection of my unloved past. I had never even had a steak at home. But, really, Eileen was without imagination or enthusiasm in the kitchen as in bed, everywhere dull, dull, dull. "Let's not talk about home," I interrupted myself shamelessly, "it makes me feel too lonely—" As I gazed away out of the half-window that let in a little of the last light, I felt an incredibly real nostalgia for my imaginary household. "I even miss the noise!"

"She's a lucky woman," Judith sighed, and only Ed Fenton laughed, too pleased with himself to challenge me.

He had brought along a bottle of whisky, which we all welcomed, Judith especially throwing the first drink into herself with an exaggerated gesture of abandon.

"Our last magic!" I told her, and she giggled.

"Take it easy, Jude," Hank said, turning toward us over one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shoulder his grave, pallid face, whose fixed paleness seemed a mask or the make-up of a silent movie comedian. His back tapered classically to his narrow waist with an impressive ripple of muscles under his sweat-soaked shirt. I wondered what he thought of me.

After two more quick, stiff drinks, Judith began to laugh, almost hysterically, "How silly I am—how silly I am! Why you're just human, after all. . . ."

"I can't answer for Milton," Fenton said. "As for me I'm prepared to demonstrate on demand."

"But what the hell *is* wrong with Carl Sandburg? I like him," Hank cried suddenly, wheeling around. It was a continuation of our discussion the night before, during which Hank had said nothing, only stared from face to face, turning his head with the conversation as if it were something really passing through the air, a pingpong ball, a shuttlecock. "He's *real*—full of power and truth—the real America. My America. I know it." He held up his two large knotted fists under our noses, as if for inspection, as if they were the real America.

"Out of the quarrel with ourselves poetry—out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric." It was Fenton quoting, but he was not really interested, merely responding mechanically to cue.

For me and Hank, though, it was a real discussion, in code, of course, for neither of us yet knew exactly what was at stake between us. "He's not a poet, that's the only thing wrong with him! He doesn't make forms or music—just speeches. He's not real at all; he gives you only words—tough words, but still words. Where are 'hands that can grasp, eyes that can dilate. . . .'"

" 'Hair that can rise if it must. . . .' " Fenton capped my beginning, glad to be playing the old game.

"Should I put on some music. I have the Brahms Fourth—" Judith had risen and was straightening her skirt over her full thighs; she must have put on weight recently, for the cloth was pulled too tight, a seam on her right flank opening. Beneath her skirt, her legs, white, hairless and slender, tapered so quickly that they seemed almost too thin. I could feel tingling in my hands how it would be to touch her high up under the darkness of that too-tight skirt, the smooth doughy pallor of her inner thigh where it met the first crisp, damp wisps of hair. "Hands that can grasp . . ."

"He's *real,* for God's sake! It's you fellows who are word merchants, aesthetes— Raw experience! that's why you don't understand him. It *hurts* too much to understand him." I had never heard Hank talk at such length, and I was amazed that Judith, searching through a pile

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of records, could ignore so extraordinary an event, Fenton pay no attention. "Form—music! The kind of pattern life's got, Sandburg's got. But I can understand how that's hard to see from New York."

"I live in Texas."

"Don't any of you people *like* music? You can keep talking if you like—you don't have to be still."

"You *live* in Texas—but it's where you come from that counts. Where were you born?"

"New York."

"You *see*!" He turned triumphantly toward Fenton, who was nodding as if in agreement, though with whom it would have been difficult to say. "I suppose you like Wallace Stevens?" He said it as if it were the name of a disease.

"Sooo— I'll put on the Brahms, *and* I'll have another drink." She poured herself another, very dark, with the air of someone compounding a dangerous remedy.

"I met him in Chicago once, in 'nineteen or 'twenty," Fenton put in, before I could answer.

"Who?" I asked. It annoyed me to think of the year 1919, when I was five years old and Fenton already full of the power to harm and love.

"Who, for Christ sake? Sandburg! He was stupid, you know—just a fish gasping on the strand. The only time he was really happy was when he was playing that damn guitar of his. He should have been a vaudeville actor, a dialect comedian—in the American dialect. Like the Jews who used to imitate Jews." He looked over at me with a wink of complicity. "Personally I prefer Smith and Dale. 'I'd like to see you inhale?' 'You'd like to see me in hell?' " His Yiddish accent was deliberately atrocious, a real provocation.

"But this is Weingartner! I borrowed it specially for tonight. Just listen to the—"

"Goddam it," Hank shouted, pounding one of his large, red fists on the floor, "I still want to know what's wrong with him. Why doesn't anybody face up to the—"

"Oh, shush, dear, you'll wake the baby!" Judith had moved over beside Hank, and was ruffling his hair tenderly.

"Don't get me wrong, Amsterdam. I like *your* poetry, too. I like different kinds of poetry—and I think you're goddam good. You're no Wallace Stevens."

"Thanks."

"No! Don't give me that New York high hat. I like what you do,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Amsterdam. I like you. And I don't bullshit. What I say, I mean. Don't I, Jude?"

"He does, Mr. Amsterdam. He likes you better than any of the younger poets."

"You've got them all beat six ways from the ace, Amsterdam. But it's too easy for you—that's what gets me mad. There's a kind of Club and you were born belonging to it. You're in, and Hank Somers is out. You know what's bad and you know what's good, and you even know why. But I don't know beans." He looked for a moment as if he were improbably going to weep. "What's more, you know where to get published, too, because you've got friends who were born feeling the same way. And don't they know it—oh, don't they just *know* it!"

" 'Twenty it must have been," Fenton cut in. He had been puzzling away at the date all along, as heedlessly in his own groove as the record making mechanically all those enormously Brahmsian statements, while only Judith listened or pretended to. "Certainly 'twenty—because a year later I went to France. It was before I knew Zelda and Scott, I remember that clearly. And a year after they had bounced me out of the Yale Theological Seminary in 'eighteen—giving me back to literature and life. You know why I was expelled?" He wanted us with him, but only on his own terms, in his own world—and no one would listen.

"But nobody publishes Hank Somers. And I'm good, too. I'm *good* —I know it. I'd know if I was bad, wouldn't I? Am I right, Jude?"

"He's a little drunk, but he's right, Mr. Amsterdam."

"But I'm no Jew, Amsterdam. Let's be frank with each other. Leave me alone, Judy—just let me talk. I respect the Jews; I *love* them, God damn it; but they're in and I'm out—they've inherited the earth. If you're not a Jew or a goddam fairy like that—like that—"

"Fleetwood Demby," I helped him out.

"A Jew or a fairy, you can't get published in America. Who the hell does this country belong to?"

"Look at Fenton," I said hopelessly, "he's no homosexual or Jew either, God knows, and—"

But Fenton was paying no attention. "Do you know why I was thrown out of that Seminary into the lap of literature? For writing a term paper on self-abuse in the Old Testament. Self-Abuse in the Old Testament. I proved the crime of Onan wasn't masturbation at all but simple birth control by withholding. Did you know that?"

"I'm not saying it isn't fair, Amsterdam. The Jews have earned every goddam thing they've got." He had seated himself in front of me on the floor, leaning forward until his forehead almost touched mine,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and staring into my eyes with his own pale, watery, round, blue ones, as if he were trying to hypnotize me. "This is a Jewish Age—an age of Jewish art and Jewish science—psychoanalysis, sociology. But we don't understand it, Amsterdam—we others—it doesn't speak our language. Leave me alone, Judy. Take these kids who come here from New York to give us poor yokels the word. Take that Herbert Ginsburg." He picked the most obvious example, of course, a cartoonist's Jew, one of the assistants in political science who was always in the center of our evening discussions, his long, nervous hands fluttering, and his sallow head, with the oily, black hair and the large glasses on the eager, curved nose, moving up and down, up and down. . . . "Herb can talk rings around me on any subject, including those he doesn't know a frigging thing about. But for Christ's sake, I *know* I'm smarter than he is. I just don't have the vocabulary; I wasn't born into the goddam Club."

"Can't we change the subject," Fenton objected. "The only thing I have against the Jews is that people spend too much time talking about them—especially the Jews themselves. When I was your age, Somers, I'd never met a Jew. Listen, I came down out of that Seminary to conquer New York, the dewiest *goy* that ever lived. But I had a copy of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* under my right arm, and a pair of brass knuckles in my left pocket!"

He stopped to laugh, and Hank roared into the gap, "When you were my age—" It was apparently the only thing he had heard of Fenton's whole harangue. "How old do you think I am? I'm no child. Thirty, that's what I am, thirty last week—and this goddam successful Amsterdam, this—this loverboy, this poet everyone loves, he can't be more than a year or two older— Seven children!"

"I'm thirty-eight." And I'm lost, too, I wanted to add, trapped in the admiration and contempt of those who do not really know me; but there was nothing I could have said that would not have made me seem an even more arrant prig.

"You don't look it," Judith interposed. "You look younger than Hank."

"Thirty years old and I've never published anything—not a line. Do you know that I haven't been able to write for a year thinking of how it would be to be thirty. How can I be sure I'm alive when no one will tell me so—and I'm already half dead. I don't want to be loved, Amsterdam, just to have someone know I was here. Here!" He pointed violently at his thick, sweaty chest so there could be no doubt about exactly where he was. "But don't get me wrong. I like the Jews. The man who first convinced me I knew how to write—God damn him—he was a Jew. He taught me everything. I wasn't dumb before I knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

him, just unawakened—a Landon man, Amsterdam! He taught me the score politically, every way. I was a real hick until I met him—a Jew—a Jew professor!"

"You'd like Professor Alexander."

" 'Of a lineage once abhorred, nor yet redeemed from scorn!' " As I said the line, Fenton had found his own touchstone, waving one hand at the three of us grouped together across the room from him, and repeating at us in contempt, " 'What are all these fish that lie gasping on the strand?' 'What are all these fish that lie gasping on the strand?' " while Hank kept repeating, "I love that man, Amsterdam. I'm his *son*, really. God damn it! Sometimes I wish to Christ I were a Jew!"

And Judith responded, "Oh, but I do always. For myself, I mean. When I was little I wanted to be a boy, but ever since I reached fifteen I've wanted that other. To be born again—a Jew and an Easterner. They're so far *ahead*! I always feel that I'm limping along behind like the little lame girl in the story, that the mountain will close before I get there!"

"And I wish I were asleep." Fenton rose, a little stiffly, and I realized for the first time how small he was, even smaller than I. "By God, perhaps I am!" He was obviously annoyed, perhaps a little ill, too. "I'm sorry but I just can't stay awake. Please don't bother."

But Judith had started to walk him to the door, pulling me up beside her as she went. "You come, too, Mr. Amsterdam—and say good night like a good boy."

We stood for a little while side by side just outside the door, watching Fenton stump off with his scarcely noticeable limp. Watching him move, I felt young, almost as young as Judith. The air was no cooler really than inside the house, but I had a sense of relief at being away from the smell of the baby and the partly burned dinner, away from Hank.

"Are you sorry you came along?" she asked. "I felt the need for some protection. The night he arrived that vain old man made a pass at me. See, there's the moon!" And there it was, indeed, looking very unconvincing above the back yard in which four iron poles rose out of a rubble of seared grass and empty beercans, and a score of diapers hung motionless in the oppressive dark. Judith had pressed up almost against me, her breasts bobbling just under my nose as she lurched a little uncertainly; she was considerably taller than I. My mouth was on the level of her long, obviously proffered neck, and I kissed her there, feeling the muscle and cartilage move with the movement of her breath under the smooth, salty flesh.

"I like the way you taste," I said foolishly, pulling her the final

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

inch toward me, but I did not foresee the fury with which she responded, enveloping me in the total, blind surge of an amoeba ingesting its food. Her two large, flat hands were on my shoulder blades, pressing me upwards; and her mouth on mine, loose and wet, so that her saliva trickled down my chin, while her tongue, taut and furious, was thrusting into me as if my whole dark inwards were a sheath for its quivering length. It was absurd to be kissed so malely, from above; and I tilted her backward until her knees bent, one hand in the small of her back, the other under her skirt. She wore nothing underneath, no girdle, no pants—and her ass was surprisingly, pleasantly cool, though the little tuft of hair where the buttocks began to swell and separate was damp with perspiration.

Some students passing in a car hooted at us in good-natured mockery, for we were spotted in the fall of light from a street-corner lamp. Looking up, I could see the shirtless men, the hypnotically rocking ladies watching us dully from the porch across the way between slapping at mosquitoes. The students roared by a second time with much hornblowing and cries of encouragement, and I could hear them screaming into a turn at the next corner for a third venture. "Look now," I protested, "we're goldfish in a bowl!"

But she was not listening, her breath coming thick and labored. She had not heard the students nor noticed the neighbors; and if she had, she would not have cared. "Oh, this is just what I wanted," she whispered, "just what I wanted. You don't know how long I've been waiting!"

Between the shame I felt at the discrepancy of our desires, and the horror stirred in me by the excessive tug of her need, my cautious, trivial excitement drained out of me. To hide my confusion from myself, I let my head fall on to her breast, kissing the white rise of flesh, coolly and as if according to plan; and I knew in that instant with a pang of nausea the failure and shame that make a Don Giovanni. But she moved away uneasily. "Don't," she said, "I *hate* my breasts. They're so obvious and stupid. Like the girl on the cover of a movie magazine." And she led me in.

"You were a long time," Hank noted mildly when we entered. It was hard to tell from the pale mask of his face if he were really disturbed or not. He had finished the bottle while we were gone, and was slumped now in the easy chair beside the phonograph, watching the needle speed frantically in the trap of the final groove. The baby was asleep, and there was no sound except for the endless, hushed rasp of the record.

Judith turned it off with one hand, falling into Hank's lap, and ruffling his lank reddish hair, as she kissed him tenderly once beside

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

each ear. Meanwhile, he scrutinized her gently with a humility I did not understand, one stiff hand on either side of her thickish waist, and his head bowed in self-abasement. "You need a shave," she said to him, and to me, "Isn't he *cute*?"

But I, baffled by the surge of jealousy my desire could no longer justify, merely stared at them dumbly, thinking, "The glib Jews, oh, those glib Jews!" It irked me that Hank should profit by the passion I had stirred in his wife and for which I had no use.

"And he's a good poet, too," she added decisively, taking from the top of a bookcase an untidy pile of papers. For an instant, I felt as if Judith had tried to buy from me with the embrace of a moment before my approval of her husband's verse, and I almost cried out, "I never read the poetry of my friends!"

But Hank cut me off. "Oh, Christ, Judith, don't bother Mr. Amsterdam with that stuff! It's all hogwash, you know—" Yet he seemed all at once almost cold sober, and reached out to take the poems, which, after a moment's urging, he began to read aloud in his flat, meaningless voice. He would look up at the end of each piece, half proud, half embarrassed, with an engaging grin I had not seen before; and I, glib Jew, would force myself to say something in comment and praise.

Actually, I could not listen. The heat in that low-roofed basement was like an intended torture; my handkerchief was too wet to dry my face any longer; and I could feel the sweat on my forehead pearl drop by drop, hang, and run slithering beside my nose into the corner of my mouth. When I raised my right hand to my face, I could smell on it the female smell of Judith.

She was sitting on the floor beside me, both of us looking up at Hank, except when she would turn to me her melting face in an abandon too naked and proud to hide. She would reach out compulsively from time to time to grab my hand or stroke my thigh; once even kissing my shoulder, with only the barest pretense of caution, her breast pressed against my arm.

And with each caress she would cry aloud, "Isn't it wonderful. I told you he was good. He won't believe how good he is!" as if the comments atoned for her gestures, or the gestures for the comments, it was hard to tell which. If Hank noticed what was going on (and how could he have helped it), he said nothing; perhaps, he, too, felt that something must be paid for my presence.

"It's hard to tell just from listening," I said. "I'll have to take them home with me, go over them carefully."

At this, the baby awoke, screaming in a sudden start of anguish, and Judith took her up into her arms to soothe her, cooing over her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

pain with the same aroused indiscriminate love that was washing over Hank and me. "Oh, my poor baby, she's so hot, so hot! Mama's poor baby. Hank, take Susie up to the Burnhams. They have a screened-in porch," she explained, turning to me, "it's so much cooler. But sit with her, Hank, until she falls asleep again. Don't leave her screaming!" She stared at me as she said this in terrible openness to be sure I knew why she was doing it, to be *sure*.

"You'll have to make a bottle first." He clearly did not want to go, but seemed helpless before her, abject in the face of her superior passion, or perhaps ashamed for the pang of jealousy he felt, resolved to make it up to her.

"Certainly, dear." She stooped to kiss him on the nose on her way out, and disappeared into the tiny dim alcove of the kitchen, where we could hear her moving about behind the grease-stained, flowered curtain.

During her absence, Hank turned to me twice, opening his mouth and raising his hand in the gesture of one about to enter a plea, but he finally said nothing.

No sooner was he out of the door, than Judith flung herself down beside me, as one throws away something of little worth; wordlessly, she engaged me, her mouth on and over mine, that dark insistent tongue probing, her teeth thrust against mine almost painfully. We fell sideways on to the rug, she pressed into me so that her whole lower body touched mine at every point; and she ground into me the soft belly, the hard pelvic bone, circle and thrust, circle and thrust, with an impersonal force that was more an assault than an embrace. Though my hands and lips were moving up and down her, I could not really touch her; it was as if she were masturbating alone in an unknowable place toward which she ran headlong, her breath faltering painfully and her heart pounding so hard between us that for a moment I feared she might faint or die.

It seems now inconceivable that I did not take her completely there on the floor; but I was afraid that Hank might return at any moment, and besides, a kind of coldness had begun to grow in me at the madness, the cruelty of her heat. Her motive seemed a force beyond passion, a kind of voluptuousness of hate aimed at destroying behind the image of the spoiled poet or the beloved Jew, behind any me however genuine, my maleness, my essential power—or even some larger impersonal potency that I shared also with Hank, and which she could not attain.

"Look," I tried to say at one point, "your husband will—" But it struck me as funny to be worrying about the returning husband like

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

an actor in a farce, and I felt such a ninny I could not finish. Though the tidal motion of her hips had ceased at last, and she had rolled away from me to lie prone with her hands folded behind her head, she was not listening to me.

"Do you know," she began as if to herself, "Hank hasn't made love to me in six months. Not even this much. He never wants me any more. If he would only take me like this—only this—I would be so happy. You're so strong, Milton, so strong." She reached over to touch my biceps submissively. "I know that it's his writing that's the trouble. If he could only publish something he would feel like a man. He would feel he had earned me, earned the right to love me. He's very—very chivalrous." She laughed quietly to herself at the ridiculous word. "I try to understand him! I try very hard—"

There was the expected sound from above at last, Hank stumbling down the stairs toward the cellar.

"I've been faithful to him for two years, two and a half now. I swear to you, you're the first I've gone even this far with, and God knows it's been hard. I'm pretty, you know, and—and I need loving, a lot of it. But he doesn't want me. You want me, don't you, Milton?" She had risen before I could answer, almost as if she were afraid to wait for my response; and had gone into the kitchen alcove, where she turned on the water, very hard. "It's just that poetry of his, I know. If only someone would tell him how good it is. He needs confidence so badly, and I can't seem to give it to him—confidence in his own power— Oh, Milton, I love you!"

She seemed quite unaware of the inconsequence of her final remark, and meanwhile, Hank was at the door, smiling sheepishly at me, as if preparing to apologize for something in which *he* had been caught out.

"Susie's asleep—asleep. I hope you enjoyed yourself while I was gone."

"If you call washing dishes enjoying yourself!" Judith shouted over the clatter in the sink. She was not, I suppose, really trying to deceive him, merely lying out of some etiquette I did not understand, some allegiance to the abstract notion of what a woman must do.

"It's late. I have to go." I started for the door quickly in a kind of flight, but Judith followed, wiping her hands on her apron. "You never talked about your children," she said plaintively. "I still don't even know their names."

"Stay, stay!" Hank insisted. "You haven't told me yet what's wrong with Carl Sandburg. It was just getting interesting."

But I was already through the door and into the desolate yard. Judith came out after me, Hank's poems in her hand.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"You forgot these," she said accusingly. "We have to help him, Milton!" It was as if we were old accomplices; and when I reached out to take the manuscript, she leaned over to kiss me again, gently this time, her hands clasped behind my neck. I could see in the glare of the street lamp how pale her lips were, kissed clean of lipstick; and I could taste her blood where I must have bitten her earlier.

"There's no sense to this," I whispered to her. "This is an end, not a beginning. Good-by." I pressed her to me hard to emphasize the point: it was all over! And in my relief at being safely through it, I felt for her pity and a momentary tenderness.

But if she had heard my valedictory, she did not believe it. "Oh tighter," she moaned, "hold me tighter. Why doesn't Hank hold me like this. Oh, Milton— I even like your name."

It must have been at this point that I dropped the poems, though I did not realize it until I was back in my room, troubled and sleepless in the dormitory bed. "No more," I insisted. "It's stupid and cruel and *enough*!"

"I'm on the morning shift this week at the Campus Grille— I'll be home every night alone. Hank's got a job as a bartender from eight till closing." She did not listen at all, only stared at me as if she were memorizing my face. "It's up to you now, Milton—up to you!"

"I won't come!" I don't know whether I said the words aloud, or only over and over to myself like a sulky child: I won't, I won't, I won't!

The next morning before my first poetry session, I went into the Campus Grille for a cup of coffee. In half an hour I knew I would be standing safely before the group who admired me, reading Dylan Thomas, the images exploding here and there along the long phrases like fireworks in a wide night sky, and the class would sigh passionately with the passionate music of my voice; but now I could only remember that I had forgotten the damned poems, and this seemed to me the ultimate, the only real betrayal.

Judith came to take my order, shy somehow and very grave. Though I said nothing about the poems, she understood, bringing the manuscript back with the coffee and tossing it down before me reproachfully.

"Hank never saw it. I slipped it under my skirt. Why did you ever leave it behind?"

"It was an accident." I could not even believe myself.

"An accident!" She pretended to be mopping a stubborn spot on the table. "Do you want to ruin everything! Just when we've started to build up his confidence—"

"His confidence," I could not help protesting, though I knew I

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

had no right to the self-righteous tone. "You're destroying him and you give me lectures about confidence. What good will a few lies about his poems do him, when you play footsie with me right under his eyes!"

" 'Children of a future age, Reading this indignant page, Remember in a former time . . .' " she began to misquote back at me.

" '*Learn* that in a former time. . . .' "

"Schoolteacher! 'Learn that in a former time— Love, sweet love was thought a crime!' "

How could I have explained to her all the things she should have known to begin with: that I had, or seemed to have, everything that Hank wanted: a loving wife, seven children, two published books of verse, success and admiration, even Jewishness! Everything except her! Of all women in the world, she was the one I could not take.

"I don't want you to deceive him. There's no question of any lies. You said yourself his poems are really good."

"But you're really not," I cried in exasperation. "You're what's wrong with him, not his poems. You're sapping his manhood, taking his balls away—and then you cry about it!"

"Oh, what do you know!" she whispered violently, moving in close to me to let a sleepy-eyed student push past her down the aisle. "Last night Hank made love to me for the first time in six months. What do you think of that?" She smiled at me in mockery, and I could not repress a queasy pang of jealousy.

"Congratulations! I hope you'll be very happy together."

"Oh, Milton! Don't be a fool! I've borne his baby. I've worked for him—I've given up a year from my own studies to let him write. I'm a good wife." Her hand moved blindly with the rag, around and around the table, her eyes filling with tears. "I'm a person, too. Who's going to do something for me? I have a right to have some—"

"Some fun?" I suggested bitterly. "Some good clean fun?" I could not stand any more, and I rose, jarring the cup, so that the untouched coffee slopped over the rim on to the table where she continued mechanically to sop it up. "Excuse me," I said, pushing past her familiar softness, "excuse me."

I could see her as I turned to look back from the door, her eyes incredibly black with panic and tears, and her mouth no longer cruel, only frightened as she cried almost soundlessly, "What's wrong with me, darling? Oh God, what's wrong with me!"

Looking down at my hand, I was pleased to see that this time I had remembered the poems.

That morning Judith did not appear in my discussion group. But

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the next day she was there as if nothing had happened, rapt and somehow satisfied as she stared at me from the first row, without taking notes or smiling or really listening at all; while all around her the gossip and admiration rippled in excited whispers, and I could feel the class purr under my hand, more flatteringly than ever.

In the context of their approval, I began to consider my relationship with Judith as a rather gallant adventure. To have moved her to such abandon (a girl whom everyone found beautiful), under the eyes of her large, threatening husband, did this not require, after all, courage and aplomb. And to be giving her up now for the sake of that husband, did that not show an even greater courage, a real maturity? For the first time in my life, I loved myself that summer; I truly loved myself! I knew that those silly old women had seen behind my mask of fear and insecurity the true self I had never given its due.

But the real climax of my summer came only with my public lecture on the last night of the Conference. Walking through the lobby of the auditorium, unrecognized, before I was due to begin, I could hear the easy wisecracks and snickers over the title of my talk, "The Poet, the Oyster and the Sensitive Plant"; and I was pleased.

I was almost sorry that I had not worn my double-breasted palm beach suit and the hand-painted tie with the naked girls. I had hesitated for a long time before choosing the Oxford gray flannel outfit, which with the thinnest of knitted black ties and my brand new crew cut gave me the air of an up and coming young mortician. The most important thing, after all, was to look as little like Edgar Allan Poe as possible!

"I would not be here tonight," I began, "if I did not also hate poetry, as the patient on the operating table hates his cancer, or a man his wife on their Golden Anniversary." I could feel the unwilling hush of the crowd, the reluctance with which they abandoned all hope of being bored. "Which is why I have taken the title of my talk from Thomas Hood, a buffoon, an antipoet—but, alas, the greatest writer of English verse in the second half of the nineteenth century, a man among the oysters and sensitive plants. 'Oh, flesh, flesh, how thou art fishified!' "

At this point, Fleetwood Demby, who was sitting in the front row, shrieked in real delight, clapping his hands together impulsively; thus giving the signal to everyone that I was only being funny (I was, as always, not sure) and they began to laugh with relief and gratitude. The speech was pure exhibitionism, compounded in equal parts of vanity and malice, a poet's revenge; but by the time I had reached the conclusion, reading excerpts from "Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg," I was almost convinced that Hood was a truly great poet, and I knew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

with a pang that everyone present had surrendered to his nonsense as none of them had ever surrendered to my own serious verse.

And the jury debated from twelve to three
What the verdict ought to be,
And they brought it in as Felo de Se,
"Because her own leg had killed her!"

Afterwards, there were the handsqueezings and shoulderslappings, and the confidential asides of those eager to make it perfectly clear that the joke was on someone else. Eight or ten of my own poetesses, who had waited humbly for the chance to be heard, came last of all to assure me that I had been a "real experience," "a revelation," and that their lives were forever changed; I felt a maudlin affection for the self they all loved, and I pressed their wrinkled hands warmly, even kissed the one blue-haired lady who frankly wept.

I wanted only to be alone with my elation; and I moved out onto the stone verandah, into the stifling night. My flannel jacket was too heavy for me, strangling, and as I struggled to slip out of it, I could feel someone behind me take hold of the collar to help. Turning to say thank you, I discovered Judith.

"What did you think of it?" I could not help asking, the feel of the applause in me still, like the sense of the sea after a day at the shore.

"You were very handsome."

"What an answer!"

"I never make the right answers. You'll just have to get used to it." For a moment she seemed to consider crying, then changed her mind. "Hank and I are giving a farewell party for the Writers' Conference tonight. We've just decided. There'll be all sorts of stupid people there—but it won't matter. Please, come!"

"Thanks," I said coldly, "but I—"

"Let's go, Milton. After all, I'll be there, and we've got a lot to celebrate, you and I." It was Fenton again. "Demby and Miss Manfred are flying home tonight, and Bligh's driving them to the airport. So it's up to us. How can Mrs. Somers bid farewell to the Writers' Conference without any writers!"

"I'm sorry about the others," I said to Judith. "It must be a disappointment—"

"I don't care about the others, and you know it, Milton. Come!" She was oblivious of Fenton, who grinned happily at my discomfiture.

"I'm tired and hot and I want to change first. Maybe later." I wanted really to stand under a shower, and let the thoughts of the last

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thirteen days run over and over through my mind: the shining eyes, the cries of delight, the applause.

Judith merely stared at me in silence, her eyes growing larger and larger, beginning to brim over in their slow, exasperating way.

"Ed Fenton will be glad to entertain you on the way home." I don't know why I wanted to hurt her, but I was pleased when she tried to slap me, the tears really falling now. Why wouldn't she admit that it was all over! I caught her wrist and said, "I'll come back. I'm sorry."

"*I'm* sorry," she protested. "I never say anything right. I never understand anything."

"And I'm not sorry at all. 'An aged man is but a paltry thing . . . unless soul clap its hands and sing. . . .' What would you like me to sing, Mrs. Somers?" He took her by the arm and drew her off, beginning some old vaudeville tune I did not recognize. She was laughing before they were out of hearing, and I thought a little ruefully that she seldom laughed with me.

In my own room, I saw the bundle of Hank's poems on my bed, beside my already packed suitcase; the summer was almost over, and I knew I would have to go back to the party after all.

But by the time I arrived, the party was impenetrable to me. I saw neither Hank nor Judith, not even Fenton, only an endless surging of people I knew barely or not at all; some of them were already drunk, laughing uproariously at the ritual repetitions of jokes I had never known, while the sober ones discussed politics in the loud, inflexible voices of those arguing not to convince but to be overheard. One earnest youngster was even insisting to his girl, "You can't talk about 'oysters' and 'sensitive plants' in a vacuum. What's the *class basis* of bourgeois aestheticism, that's the point." But when I stood near them hopefully, he only glared, annoyed and not recognizing me.

The points and instances that were being raised everywhere were sickeningly familiar to me, the warmed-over sophistries of fifteen years of Communist apologetics, giving me the sense of being served again a mess I had vomited up years before. I moved in my loneliness (only a moment ago everyone was clapping and crowding around me) from room to room through the three apartments of that shabby lodging house, in and out of which the party sprawled. It was like moving in a dream through the recollections of one's youth, powerless to change a single regretted idiocy. Powerless!

I would find Hank, give him his poems and leave. Finis. I came upon him finally in the yard, also alone and leaning against a tree, with a can of beer tilted to his lips. I took the beer from his hand and finished it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The real poet," he said thickly, "no oyster, no plant."

"Thank you for the beer."

"Thank *you.*"

"I'm the one who should thank you."

"God damn it, can't I even thank you if I want to!"

I do not know why I failed to realize that he was already very drunk. I only knew that he was not looking at me out of his eyes; but I did not want to look at him either, for I knew the meaning of his mask now: the stylized face of the impotent, the cuckold.

I handed him his poems, which he stuck carelessly into a back pocket of his pants. "I'm glad to say I liked them very much, especially the group you call 'Family Dinner.' I was afraid I wouldn't."

"What were you afraid of? You didn't *have* to like them."

"Anyhow, I did."

"Thanks."

"You said that in advance." I went on to tell him exactly what had impressed me about the poems, and what I thought was wrong; but he only stood there, half-smiling and noncommittal. If he was pleased it didn't show. "You don't believe me? You don't believe you're a real poet?" Why should he have believed it? I could get no conviction into my voice, though I was not lying.

"I believe I'm a—" He looked around suspiciously. "Where's Jude?"

"I don't know."

His smile widened slyly, and he walked off, calling back over his shoulder, "Thanks, Amsterdam. Thanks a lot." But I had wanted him to be happy, to like me for making him happy. After all, I was giving up a lot for him. A verse came into my head, and I said it over to myself.

The cuckold and the cuckold's friend,
They do not lie together;
Yet each holds up the other's end
In every sort of weather!

I tried to remember how I had felt that evening when the speech was over, and the waves of applause had washed up over me, but it was all fading from my mind. I needed to urinate, and as I stumbled up a dark stairwell toward the door someone had pointed out to me, I bumped into Judith coming down.

"It's you!" she cried delightedly. "You, Milton, and I was sure you weren't coming. And the party was only for you. For you and me—the whole party."

I kissed her and we stood looking at each other, neither of us

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moving. I was uncomfortable, and had nothing to say.

"Don't *hate* me, Milton!" she cried, looking at me in sudden alarm, and then, "But you have to *go*! You only have to go, and I thought you hated me." Taking me by the arm, she led me to the door.

"I'll wait for you here," she said, "don't worry."

"I'm not worried, it's just that—"

"You foolish boy, *go* and be done with it!"

Later, we walked out into the back yard that was already full of drinkers and talkers under the invisible clotheslines which hung like concealed hazards in the dark. Judith knew the location of each one, and she would cry "duck!" just in time for us to crouch down together, run through, as though we were crossing into enemy territory. From one of the apartments, the radio was blaring the revolutionary pseudo-blues of Leadbelly and Josh White, and the Songs of Spain from the Lincoln Battalion.

The war in Spain! It was as if nothing else counted, as if my life ever since had been only a masquerade that had fooled no one. I looked down at the girl beside me, scarcely past twenty, and I recalled what I had been sure once I would never forget: the self-pity, the melancholy, the horror of being young. And I longed for the pleasant ennui of maturity, even for the time of my marriage. "I'm a haunted house tonight. For Christ sake, exorcise me!"

She laughed doubtfully, and together we ducked around one corner of the house, out of sight of the rest. Standing in a narrow lane, beside the untidy hedge of the neighboring garden, we hid like children who creep off to enjoy their small loot. I pressed Judith back against the peeling siding of the house, as I might have embraced a girl at sixteen; but she responded with that atrocious assault I could never really remember. "Darling, darling," she gasped between kisses, "I thought you hated me. I thought you would never come."

Just then, lights flashed on in the darkened house beyond the hedge, and a head, thrust from an upper window, began to scream, more in hysteria than in real anger, *"Drunks! Trollops! Get out of my flower beds. I'll call the police! I know what you're up to down there. Drunken no-goods! Get out!"*

The sudden blaze of light, the mad voice and the frantic head frightened me as I have not been frightened in thirty years. I could feel my heart pound as if I were really the child I had been playing, really, in the child's absolute sense, *caught*! I could scarcely keep from crying out, "Please, momma, I'm not doing anything!" But Judith was pulling me back into her own yard, terrified and trembling; and there a half-dozen faces turned to stare at us, silent and uncertain.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It's just that nut next door," someone shouted out of the dark, and everyone began to laugh, turning back from us to their own affairs; but I could feel Judith beside me, shaking with alternate giggles and sobs.

"Stop it!" I said, grabbing her by the shoulders. "Stop it!"

"I'm scared," she whispered, "can you imagine it, scared! How stupid it all is. How ugly and stupid! The crazy old bitch. Oh, why didn't you come during the week?" She held out one hand to me, the fist balled, as one offers a surprise to a child; then opened her fingers right under my nose. "Look!"

I looked at the key on her open palm.

"It's for the attic apartment, the one that's empty. I'm supposed to show it when anyone comes. If you'd care to see it, Mr. Amsterdam?" She closed her hand again suddenly. "But I'm afraid. I don't want to go up now. Tell me, why don't I want to go up, when I want you so much? You know everything."

"You *do* want to," I said, thinking that, after all, this was the way it had to end: in the consummation of the myth, right here above all the foolish kids who recapitulated, without knowing it, my own hated youth. "Just because he's human," the phonograph was bellowing, "he doesn't want a bullet through his head. . . ."

She came along without another word; walking with me silently up the narrow stairs; waiting silently as I fumbled at the lock; pressing silently against me as we crossed the threshold into the black, fetid room. The heat was appalling; it seemed hardly possible to breathe, but when I started toward the window she stopped me.

"No windows, no lights," she whispered to me, "don't move anything." Taking me by the hand, she led me through the jumble of furniture in what must have been the living room, into a further room where we sat side by side on the bed. It was stripped and smelled a little of urine, only a stiff mattress between metal headpiece and footboard. I could hear the rustle of her dress as she pulled it over her head; and I undressed, too, slowly, putting my clothes carefully on a low table beside the bed, where I would have no trouble finding them again in the dark.

After a while, I could make out the shapes of objects in the dim light that leaked through the single uncurtained window; and I was able to see that Judith was unbraiding her heavy hair, shaking it free finally with a gesture as formal as a dance step. She lay down beside me; but wet with perspiration and dazed by the stagnant air, I remained for a while without touching her; then rolled over on to one elbow, and with my free hand felt her body from head to toe, very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

carefully, seeking a cue for the passion that did not come. Her flesh was very firm under the shifting play of her long, fine hair. But she had left on her brassière, and cried out softly in protest when I tore it off. "Oh, please don't! They're so ugly since I had the baby, I feel like an old woman."

Her breasts did sag a little, but they were magnificently heavy, cool and satiny on their underside where I kissed them, feeling their whole dumb weight on my cheek. "How white you are!" I said. "You even *feel* white in the dark."

"And you black, black—my gypsy—my black Jew!" Though my hair is very dark, my skin is actually quite fair, but I submitted to the legend of myself with real delight. I could feel my body beginning to stir, and I started to roll over on top of her.

"Wait," she cried, "wait! I'm not prepared. I have no—"

"To hell with it. It's all the better." I was impatient, in my mind, already a father. More important than the moment of possession seemed to me the consequence. I could imagine our son (a *real* son this time!), his pictures sent to me secretly, rarely—then not at all, after I had grown bored with writing and had moved too often for her letters to follow me. But he would be there always, somewhere, a real token of that summer when I was the world's beloved.

"No, really, Milton. You know how I would like to have your child, how *flattered* I would be. But I can't afford it; next year I want to go back to school. Seven children should be enough for anyone, anyhow! If you don't have any sort of— I brought along a—a contraceptive for you." She handed it to me in the dark, and I let it drop to the floor, rolling away from her, as my desire oozed out of me with the sweat. My poor son!

"What's the matter?" she asked. "Darling!" Her hand moved tentatively down over my shoulder, my chest, my belly, into the darkest tangle of hair. "Oh, Milton, what's the matter with me?"

God knows what club of Hercules, what Thor's hammer she had dreamed to rend and redeem her, to be in her that summer's climax and my legend's; she found only the torpor of my flesh. I felt no coldness, no panic, only an infinite languor, and a sense of triumph over all the women whose surrogate she was. Yet something impelled me to another lie.

"Please understand. I'd like to, but I can't. I love my wife too much. I've never been unfaithful to her—and—I just can't."

"How lucky she is! How wonderful she must be! I could tell from her picture, just at a glance. Oh, Milton, I *do* understand." But she was crying, and suddenly kissing me all over, her mouth wet and very

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

warm through her tangled hair, her tears mingling with my perspiration, until she found my mouth, and began again, this time against my slippery, dead flesh, the heaving, circling motion of her hips, over and over, until the tension in her broke. I felt a million miles away.

I must have fallen asleep for an instant, for I woke to see her shadow against the window. She was fully dressed and combing that incredible hair with great tenderness, as if it belonged to someone else and had only been lent to her for the occasion.

"You're very beautiful," I said.

"So are you. It's hard to believe that you didn't really—that we didn't— I feel so satisfied, so happy."

I let her go downstairs first alone; for she was suddenly cautious and worried. By the time I had finished dressing, pausing over each article of clothing to wonder why I had not been able to take her, and why I did not care, Hank had already hit her for the first time.

My eyes had not adjusted to the brighter light, but I could see her clearly as I stood in the doorway above the street, see her just below me, quite distinctly but small and remote, as through a telescope. She was standing at one end of the circle the crowd had formed around them, not crying or attempting to fight back or even raising her hand to the scarlet place on her cheek, but just watching Hank as detachedly as I was watching them both, watching him lunge toward her for the second blow. He swung from far off, a stage punch, impressive, but not really intended to hurt; and this they both understood.

"Where were you, Jude? God damn, where were you? You stupid bitch! You stupid bitch!" The answer was clear, though she said nothing, for her face was soft and suffused with blood, her lips pale and swollen, her eyes still dissolved in languor.

"Go on in, Hank," she said quietly, "go in and go to sleep. You're drunk again." He was much drunker than when I had seen him last, willing his drunkenness now, pulling it over him like a sheltering cover. Yet everyone seemed afraid of him, afraid to break out of the protection of the buzzing circle of spectators to confront him. Only Judith tried to stare him down, her eyes fixed on his baffled, slack face. But when she tried to touch him, he bellowed in rage.

As I moved forward slowly, out of some dim sense of obligation, but without a plan, Fenton took me by the arm. "Get out of here, Milton, get out! Or somebody will get killed." I wanted to tell him that in our world such things no longer happened, that this was only the playing out of a myth, unreal; but he would not have understood.

He held his hand over his heart, theatrically I thought, as he pleaded with me; and when I shrugged him off impatiently, he staggered

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and fell to his knees. I had the stupid impulse to shout at him as if he were a stubborn child, to explain to him that it was all a mistake, that nobody could be hurt; but he had collapsed in a heap, moaning quietly to himself.

No one else had even noticed the sideshow, so I bent to pick him up, feeling only annoyance that he had come so inopportunely between me and the climax of my story; but his gray face scared me and his audible, shallow breathing. I did not want him to die; I did not want anyone to die; I did not want to believe in death—not just yet, not till the ironies were all worked out.

"Reach into my side pocket, boy, and give me the little box." His eyes stared at me glassily, but with a trace still of the old mockery. "Brace me against the tree and leave me alone. It's nothing, I have a little attack like this every six weeks." I gave him the box and he swallowed two tablets quickly, forcing them past his trembling, spit-flecked lips. "And stop staring at me like a peasant—I have no intention of dying tonight. The odds are better on you." He seemed a little stronger already, though he still pressed both hands against his chest. "I hope she was worth it, boy!"

Feeling guilty, I left him there, supported by the tree trunk; but when I looked around he shook his head pityingly, and began to sing to a tune of his own contriving, " 'What shall I do for pretty girls now my old bawd is dead!' "

The crowd had moved off, but I could hear voices from the basement apartment next to the Somers', and I rushed down the steps to find Hank just hurling Judith into the middle of the room. "This is my wife, everybody—though it's hard to tell!" He was making a real effort to speak distinctly, but his voice had grown very thick, and the whites of his eyes seemed yellow in the absolute pallor of his face. "Judy likes Jews, don't you, Judy?"

"You're drunk, Hank! Go to bed."

"I'm going to bed, Judy, but first gotta find you a nicelil Jew. No use being lonely lossa Jews around. Where did all the goddam Jews *go*?" He looked about wildly, and Herb Ginsburg stepped out of the group against the furthest wall.

"Cut it out, Hank," he said in his mild, piping voice, "you'll just be sorry in the morning."

"Here's nicelil Jew for you," Hank cried triumphantly, grabbing Herb by the arm and pushing him up against Judith. "Howdyou like this one—you like Jews so goddam much?" He pushed Herb away from him in sudden anger. "Hate your Jew face and your Jew heart. Whatchagonnado about it!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Now cut it out, Hank." He was not afraid, merely ineffectual and aware of it; but he looked back at Hank without rancor.

"Don' like my wife, do you? Think 'snot good enough for a goddam Jew. Show you who's good enough!" He swung a long slow blow in Herb's direction, his whole furious unbalanced body behind it. Someone screamed, but it landed no place, and baffled, he wheeled around to face the lookers-on, "Who wantsa fight for the Jews? Who wantsa fight?"

Each time he had said "Jew," my heart had leaped with the old blind surge of fear and fury, and I could have wept at the thought that I had unleashed that ancient terror, that he was striking at me through the caricature of Herb Ginsburg—at my insolent, loved face through that long-nosed, bespectacled, mournfully comic mask. I walked into the circle to touch Hank on the arm, unsure of what I would say until the words were out of my mouth; but it was my party and I had to end it. I don't think I was at all afraid.

"Come on, Hank."

He half-turned, looking at me uncertainly for a moment, in a silence as blunt and sudden as a shout. One balled fist was still poised, and his huge body tilted crazily over my own short, slight figure; then, putting an arm around one shoulder and leaning his weight on me like a trustful child, he said in a little voice, "I'll come, Amsterdam. I like you."

"Let's get some air."

He must have lost consciousness completely as we climbed the steps, for the sag of his body nearly pulled me over; but his embrace did not loosen. As we passed the tree, I could see Fenton, much recovered now, shaking all the beer cans within reach to see if one still gurgled. "Bloom and Stephen," he cried in a loud, curious voice. "You can't tell the players without a program." There was no malice in his glance, only pleasure; and I knew he thought that I had laid Judith, was going to fight Hank. I had misunderstood him all along; he had not hated me at all, only wanted me to deserve the summer's admiration, to exploit it as he would have thirty years before.

"Bloom and Stephen," he cried again, evoking sentimentally the image of fatherhood that I did not resent. "Take it easy, son!" He had found a not quite empty can, and was pouring the warm slops into his mouth, wiping his untidy beard with one arm.

"Got sit down," Hank said suddenly, lurching forward so far that his head almost hit the ground. I steered him around the corner, and eased him down on to the curbstone, sitting myself beside him as a prop. His arm had never relaxed its hold.

"Judy sno damgood." It was hard for him to make the sounds.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"To hell with Judy. You have your work, your poems—a daughter. Forget it!"

"Sno damgood." Nothing showed through his eyes any longer, absolutely nothing.

"Listen!" I said, though I was sure that he was not registering—just for the record. "You may not remember this, but she's going to destroy you. She doesn't *want* to destroy you, she just has to. There are some women who take a man's balls away and they can't help it." I was explaining, I guess, chiefly to myself. "She has to suck you in like a vacuum cleaner, because she's a vacuum cleaner. It's simple."

"Goddam milking machine," he added with surprising aptness, making in the air the motions of a machine gone mad, pulling senselessly at exhausted udders, unable to stop. Finally his hands fell into his lap. "Milking machine," he said again with great effort.

We sat in silence for a long time, looking into the empty, dry gutter until I thought Hank was asleep; but he turned to me slowly at last, putting a large hand on each of my shoulders: *"Listen Amsterdam I love you more than Judy can more than Judy* !" In the pauses between words he seemed to doze off, rousing himself with a special act of will each time, as if this were the whole point of everything, and for that instant, I believed it was. This was the final triumph, to be loved by the man I had worst offended; but I wanted more.

"Hank, can you understand me?"

"Understand."

"You have to apologize—to Herb Ginsburg, to everyone—" I did not want to say the word "Jew."

"Did I hurt him? Hurt him?" He was half-sobbing. "Goddam sorry, Amsterdam."

I heaved him up by the arm and led him back down into the lighted basement room, where everyone still sat in the same place, as if held there by a spell until our return.

"Wanta apolo—gize." Hank lurched and I put an arm around him again, trying not to look smug. It was a wonder he could stand at all; but he was immensely strong. "Herb—sorry!"

"That's okay, Hank. You're drunk, and when a fellow's drunk—"

"No. Love the goddam Jews and I'm mashamed, mashamed." He stumbled over toward Herb, dragging me with him, and clasped him to his free side. "Veryvery sorry."

"Come to bed, dear." Judith moved slowly toward Hank, looking at me the whole time, grateful and dazzled and soft. I could feel myself preening for her and for the rest who stared uncomfortably at the four

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of us in the center of the floor. I regretted only that Fenton seemed to have left.

"Jesus," Herb protested in his eunuch's voice, "it's enough already. Whose idea was this anyway?" He looked at me with visible contempt. "The guy's drunk. And God knows he had provocation. Enough already!"

"It was his own idea," I lied. "He'll feel better tomorrow if he gets it off his chest." I wished in my heart that Hank had smashed in Herb's supercilious face, breaking the glasses, splintering that melancholy, greasy nose.

"I can't stand it," Herb kept protesting. "He had provocation. Enough is enough," but Hank was moving inexorably from one person to another, shaking every embarrassed hand in the room. He would look back over his shoulder at me each time, for approval and encouragement.

Finally he was through, and I said into the silence, "Let's go!"

"About time!" Herb exclaimed.

"Go!" Hank answered. "Herb come, too."

All four of us climbed painfully up one short flight of steps, and down the other next door. The baby was screaming relentlessly, hoarse and too tired to stop; but she smiled and said da-da when Judith took her in her arms.

"Silly girl," she exclaimed, "she calls me da-da. Poor abandoned darling!"

"C'min anhavea drink!"

"There's nothing to drink, dear," Judith objected. "Please go to bed!"

"Shutup." He said it mildly but firmly. "Have a drink anyway!" It must have been intended for a joke, because he tried to laugh. Once in his own house, he seemed less drunk, and I wondered if he hadn't been shamming a little, *using* his drunkenness.

"Poor dear," Judith said, reaching out one hand to stroke his hair. "He won't remember a thing in the morning."

"Let's only hope so," Herb put in.

"Don't touch me and shutup. Amsterdam, les talk. Don't leamme alone. Christ, don't leamme alone." He shuddered at the touch of his wife's hand, moving across the room in my direction as if in search of asylum.

"Sure, let's talk," I said, "but about what? Sandburg?"

"You're a strong lilbastard, Amsterdam. You carried me. Weigh hunneranninety pounds."

Judith had gone into the kitchen alcove to prepare a bottle for the baby; and stumbling across the room, Hank pulled to the curtain, winking at me in complicity.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Les wrestle, Amsterdam. See how strong."

"Why don't you get some sleep, Hank. You need it." Herb reached out a hand toward him, but did not quite touch him. "You're strong, too. *Everybody's* strong." He turned to me with a look of hostility I could not fathom. "Jesus, Mr. Amsterdam, he's drunk as hell!"

"Goodboy, Herb. We're pals."

"Sure thing, Hank," Herb answered without conviction.

"Les wrestle, Amsterdam." He grabbed my right arm with one hand, and crooking the other elbow over and around my neck, tried to force me to the ground. Even drunk, he was powerful, and I could feel myself giving at the knees. Without really thinking, I put a shoulder into his belly and flipped him backwards and to the right, so that he landed sitting down. I have learned a little judo from the boys at the school; and though I am not very apt, with someone as slowed-up in his reactions as Hank, it is easy to look good.

He charged back again, not knowing what had happened, and this time I tossed him to the left, while he yelled incredulously, "Look, Judy, he's throwing me. He's beating me! He's beating me!"

It was a cry of pure joy, and suddenly I could stand it no longer. Our whole cloying, ambiguous relationship disgusted me; and it seemed to me that I must *really* fight him, show him I could hurt him even on his own terms—anti-Semite and quasi-cuckold and slobbering lush! I moved in fast now, grabbing him before he could brace himself, and heaved him over my shoulder so that he flew through the air halfway across the room, landing with the limp thud of a drunk. "Wouldn't believe it," he muttered, his head against the edge of the couch, "wouldn't—" and he was asleep.

I looked around proudly as if for applause, feeling myself the champion of my woman, the defender of the Jews! But Judith in the archway was intent on burping the baby, mumbling as she gently thumped its back, "He won't remember a thing in the morning!" She apparently found real comfort in the thought, an assurance that in some sense nothing had happened at all. And when I turned to Herb, I found him watching me, not only with contempt as before, but with fear—as if, after all, I were not really a Jew.

"I'm going," he said, deliberately avoiding my eyes. "I'll wait for you outside, Mr. Amsterdam, with my jaloppy."

I knew that he would not be there, that I would never see him again, and I wanted to explain to him the nobility of my motives before he escaped; but all I could manage to say was, "outside," as I waved him a vague farewell. Somewhere, somehow, I knew, I had done

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something wrong; but I could not think what in my weariness and the unbroken heat.

"Here!" Judith said into the embarrassed silence that followed. "Hold her! She's so cute! I want her to like you. I want her to marry someone like you. I want her to be happy."

I took the baby into my arms awkwardly, and she began to cry, pushing at me furiously with her tiny hands. "She doesn't like me," I said, a little mournfully.

"She's upset, poor thing. She's been teething. Oh, *Milton*!" Judith flung her arms around my neck, resting her head, under its golden burden of hair, against my right shoulder, while the baby squirmed uncomfortably against my other. I had not known infants were so heavy.

"Tell me the truth, darling. When you didn't—when you couldn't—I mean in bed, when you— It was *really* your wife, wasn't it?" Her refusal to call my impotence by its proper name irked me. "I mean, it wasn't that I didn't attract you, that you didn't *like* me at all? It was your wife!"

"I don't have a wife," I cried in my impatience to be through with all lies. It seemed to me that even yet, at the very last moment, everything might be saved. "The one I had until three months ago, I hate, do you understand, *hate*! And I don't have seven children. I don't have any children! It was all a stupid joke!" I thrust the baby back at her for emphasis, and she folded it, screaming in terror now, into her arms.

"Oh, darling," she moaned, "what's the matter with me, what's the matter? First Hank and then you! I'm young, I'm pretty. What do I *do* to people?" How much she believed of what I had told her was not clear; but she knew certainly that I wanted to hurt her. "You hate me, too. Don't deny it! You and Hank sneaking off together. What's the matter with me?"

Her eyes widened dreadfully, not in fury but in fear, the insides of them going to pieces, the centers sucked down into some interior vortex of wetness and dark; and her fingers plucked senselessly at the folds of her skirt. "I hate myself! I don't want to live! I don't want to live, do you understand me? I hate myself, and oh, I'm scared, Milton, I'm scared!"

She clutched me again, the sobbing baby between us unnoticed, even Hank forgotten, though we were standing now between his limp legs; and he turned slightly, moaning a little, as if her cries had reached him. I could feel her uncontrollable trembling against me, her whole body like the frantic nerve that throbs inexorably in arm or thigh. "I don't know what's happening. I've never been so scared. Why am I so *scared*!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hank was trying to call out something in his sleep. "Mama," he seemed to be saying softly, "Mama!" like a child half waked out of a nightmare. But I could not be sure.

There was no use. I kissed her on the forehead, on the eyes, very gently on the mouth. "I like you, Judith. I like you a lot. It's just that—" I did not know when I started how I would finish the sentence, but it came to me all at once, the final lie. "It's just that I've never slept with a gentile girl before—and—I've heard of such things, but I never believed it— Something in me deeper than desire or love, something in the blood—refused, refused!"

"Oh my darling," she sobbed, "you do like me, you *do*! My poor Milton, my poor, poor Jew."

When I got outside there was no one in sight, and I watched alone the dawn coming drably over the empty beercans and the clothespoles and the deserted street. It was then that my desire flowed back into me, idiotically, uncomfortably, to the crowing of the first cocks; and I hobbled down the street, feeling for the first time that summer almost cold.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Pache - J S Mill
Walras - Elements
Matthews - Study in Trade Cycle History
New Fabian Essays
McCulloch - Early English Tracts on Commerce
Little - Welfare Economics

A series designed for good reading

Pleasurable reading – not the author's renown or the historical significance of his work – was the criterion by which these books of short fiction were created. In making his selection the editor has tried in each case to put himself in the place of a person eager to listen to a teller of tales. These three fine books are the result.

FRENCH STORIES AND TALES *Selected and edited by Stanley Geist.* Sixteen stories which include work by Balzac, Gide, Huysmans, Stendhal (this story has never appeared in English before), Zola, Baudelaire, Flaubert, and Maupassant. To be published July 26.

SPANISH STORIES AND TALES *Selected and edited by Harriet de Onís.* Twenty-three stories which include work by Valle-Inclán, Cervantes, Unamuno, Calvo, Mallea, Valdés, and Subercaseux. "All fine stories." *–Saturday Review*

GERMAN STORIES AND TALES *Selected and edited by Robert Pick.* Eighteen stories which include work by Broch, Hesse, Kafka, Mann, and Schnitzler. "Literary excellence of a high order . . . every one of these stories has a life of its own." *–Saturday Review*

Typography, binding, and jacket designs by Herbert Bayer

Each $3.95 at all bookstores

ALFRED A. KNOPF, *Publisher*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Louis-Ferdinand

Céline

GUIGNOL'S BAND

Céline's new novel plunges the hero of **Journey to the End of the Night** into the vice and violence of London's underworld. Here Ferdinand, a wounded young French veteran now turned spiv, is trapped in a gang of pimps and prostitutes. "Céline's technique of composition once more validates the observation of André Gide: 'Céline's is a singular sensibility; he depicts not reality but the hallucinations which reality provokes.' "—New York Times. $5.00

○○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○○

WYNDHAM

Lewis

by Hugh Kenner

Here is the first complete appraisal of the complex figure whom T. S. Eliot has called "the most fascinating personality of our time." Hugh Kenner's lively guidebook is a critically astute appraisal so written that it can be enjoyed without prior acquaintance with Lewis's many works. **Makers of Modern Literature** Series. $2.50

○○○○○○○ ○○○○○○○○○○○

Tennessee

Williams

HARD CANDY, A BOOK OF STORIES

This handsomely printed volume includes stories like "Three Players of a Summer Game" which added to Tennessee Williams' reputation as a writer in any genre when they appeared in national magazines, together with other stories like "Two on a Party" which were not considered suitable by magazines, but which display the same depth of understanding, skill, and high artistic integrity. Limited edition, boxed. $8.50

NEW DIRECTIONS *333 Sixth Avenue, New York*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED